The Silver Caesars

A Renaissance Mystery

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
Symposia

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Frontispiece, page ii: Vespasian tazza (detail), anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99 (plate 10)

Frontispiece, page x: Detail of Titus dish, anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99 (page 28, bottom)

Frontispiece, page xvi: Detail of Nero dish, anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99 (page 19, bottom).

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Preface

The Silver Caesars: A Renaissance Mystery investigates one of the most extraordinary yet enigmatic achievements of sixteenth-century goldsmiths' work: the set of twelve silver-gilt standing cups known as the Aldobrandini Tazze. Attempts to identify the origin and purpose of these great objects have been frustrated by the lack of comparable works and by the absence of any records documenting their earliest history. To make matters worse, in the centuries following their creation, the twelve tazze were incorrectly reassembled, misidentified, and then widely dispersed. In early 2014, we were able to bring together the complete set for the first time since the mid-nineteenth century. The tazze's brief reunion at The Metropolitan Museum of Art fueled a wonderful symposium at which a team of specialists developed a plan for future study; this collection of essays emerges directly from that concerted effort. Its pages reflect the highest caliber of inter-disciplinary scholarship, spanning topics from the ancient world to the most advanced methods of scientific analysis.

Our work has been made possible by a dedicated group of supporters committed to underwriting this long-term research. They include The Schroder Foundation, Selim K. Zilkha, Marina Kellen French and the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation, Nina von Maltzahn, and an anonymous donor. The publication itself was made possible by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. We are very grateful to Thomas P. Campbell, who as Director of The Metropolitan Museum championed the project from the start. At the Museum, we are indebted to Ellenor Alcorn for getting the project off the ground; Wolfram Koeppe for his many contributions along the way; and, above all, Julia Siemon, for her drive and her fresh scholarship, which have illuminated every aspect of the mystery that, as a result, has begun yielding its secrets. The exceptional generosity and collegiality of the lenders have also been crucial in facilitating this in-depth study.

Though this volume is not a catalogue, its publication coincides with an exhibition of the same name, the first public display of all twelve Aldobrandini Tazze in more than 150 years. In the exhibition, each tazza is presented in its original configuration, or as close to that arrangement as is possible. In New York, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and in Buckinghamshire, at Waddesdon Manor, audiences may discover the Silver Caesars, penetrating but still enjoying their mystery.

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Acknowledgments

I was introduced to the Silver Caesars in the spring of 2014, when Ellenor Alcorn, Curator in the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, invited me to visit the silver-gilt standing cups then temporarily gathered in the Museum's Department of Objects Conservation. Together, we took turns reading from her copy of Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* and connecting the stories to imagery on the dishes. I was enthralled and accepted her offer to begin work on a research project dedicated to the set. I am deeply grateful to Ellenor, to Wolfram Koeppe, Marina Kellen French Curator, and to Luke Syson, Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Chairman of the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, for giving me the opportunity to participate and for their support and encouragement as the project matured into a book and an exhibition.

Research into the Aldobrandini Tazze was already well under way before my involvement began. My coauthors Mary Beard, Xavier F. Salomon, Timothy Schroder, and Stefanie Walker had been thinking and writing about the set for years, and I thank them for welcoming me into the discussion. Important contributions had also been made by J. D. Wille, who graciously shared his insights, and Antonella Fabriani Rojas, whose archival discoveries are reproduced in Appendix A. Ubaldo Vitali and Andrés von Buch, two of the strongest advocates for undertaking a serious scholarly investigation of the set, have kindly served as essential interlocutors and collaborators throughout.

In June 2014, the Aldobrandini Tazze were briefly reunited at the Metropolitan Museum, where they were brought together for the first time in more than 150 years and underwent intensive campaigns of scientific testing, visual analysis, and photography. These endeavors placed heavy demands on Museum colleagues, especially those in the departments of Imaging, Scientific Research, and Objects Conservation. Their efforts have had a major impact on our knowledge of the tazze and facilitated the beautiful photography that appears in the following pages, carried out by Joseph Coscia Jr. and Juan Trujillo.

These measures were made possible through the generosity of the lenders, who, in a remarkable demonstration of cooperation, agreed to the dismantling and reconfiguration of their tazze, which involved swapping components among many of the objects in the set. For their tremendous goodwill and for agreeing to repeat the entire loan and reassembly process for the exhibition, we extend thanks to the private collectors, curators, and museum directors: Elena Hernando and Carmen Espinosa Martín of the Museo Lázaro Galdiano, Madrid; Kaywin Feldman, Eike D. Schmidt, Ghenete Zelleke, and Jennifer Komar Olivarez of the Minneapolis Institute of Art; Caterina Badan and Deborah Lambert of the Schroder Collection, London; Selim K. Zilkha; Teresa Vilaça and Maria Mayer of the Casa-Museu Medeiros e Almeida, Lisbon; Joshua Basseches and Robert Little of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; António Filipe Pimentel and Luísa Penalva of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon; Tim Reeve, Kirstin Kennedy, and Tessa Murdoch of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and anonymous private collectors.

While the tazze were at The Met in 2014, the Museum hosted a symposium dedicated to the set. On June 18 and 19 of that year, an international group of scholars gathered to present papers, discuss what was known, and map out plans for future research. This book has developed from those conversations. In addition to the contributors to this volume (excepting myself), speakers and session chairs included Denise Allen, Ian Campbell, Ashira Loike, Ernst-Ludwig Richter, William Stenhouse, Luke Syson, Pierre Terjanian, and Ubaldo Vitali. They were joined by

nearly all the curators and private collectors listed above, as well as by other specialists, including Alexis Kugel, Peta Motture, Stuart W. Pyhrr, Pamela Smith, Femke Speelberg, Richard E. Stone, and Ginette Vagenheim. Erin Pick and Tamara Schechter made sure the event went off without a hitch.

My coauthors and I have relied on a small army of people willing to aid us in our investigations. We extend thanks especially to Jane Aikin, Prince Camillo Aldobrandini, Francesca Barberini, Karen Bowen, Julius Bryant, Andrés von Buch, Anne-Marie Claessens-Peré, Michael Cole, Joseph Connors, Paola Cordera, Federico Cortese, Thierry Crepin-Leblond, John Culme, Ana Matisse Donefer-Hickie, Prince Jonathan Doria Pamphilj, Jannic Durand, Antonella Fabriani Rojas, Corrado di Giacomo, Christopher Hartop, Dirk Imhoff, Kirstin Kennedy, Alexis Kugel, Giles Mandelbrote, Lia Markey, Raúl Martínez, Alessandra Mercantini, Wim Nys, Daniele Pitrolo, Stephanie Porras, Ivo Raband, Geneviève Rérolle-Pouffier, Diana Scarisbrick, Stephen K. Scher, Lorenz Seelig, Jeanne Sloane, Luke Syson, Laura Testa, Dora Thornton, Aldo Vitali, Ubaldo Vitali, Patricia Waddy, J. D. Wille, Helen Wyld, and Carolyn Yerkes. Special gratitude is owed to Ernst-Ludwig Richter, who facilitated testing of silver samples taken from the tazze.

The production of the book was carried out by Publications and Editorial at the Metropolitan Museum. Mark Polizzotti, Michael Sittenfeld, and Peter Antony saw the value of the endeavor, and Anne Blood and Gwen Roginsky helped to make it possible. Jenn Sherman secured the images, and Christopher Heins created the useful diagram of a disassembled tazza. Paul Booth was the production manager, and Tina Henderson the designer. Philomena Mariani whipped the notes and bibliography into shape. It would be impossible to list the contributions of Sarah McFadden, our editor. The coherence of the book is a product of Sarah's insight, skill, creative problem-solving, and tireless dedication. I am deeply in her debt.

The Silver Caesars: A Renaissance Mystery accompanies an exhibition of the same name, opening at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in December 2017 before traveling to Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire in April 2018. That facet of the project involves the efforts of many of the same colleagues and collaborators who have been recognized above, and many more whose efforts cannot be done justice here. Still, I note the contributions of Melissa Bell, Linda Borsch, Paul Caro, Meryl Cohen, Martha Deese, Kate Farrell, Scott Geffert, Kristen Hudson, Daniel Kershaw, Jaime Krone, Mortimer Lebigre, Christine McDermott, Rachel Mustalish, Lauren Nemroff, Amber Newman, Frederick Sager, Robin Schwalb, and Katharina Weistroffer. I especially thank Thomas P. Campbell, Director of the Metropolitan Museum during the formative and research phases of this project, Daniel H. Weiss, President and CEO, Quincy Houghton, Deputy Director for Exhibitions at The Met, and Pippa Shirley, Head of Collections and Gardens at Waddesdon Manor.

Finally, I express wholehearted appreciation on behalf of all my collaborators to the benefactors who have made our project a reality. We thank The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for making this publication possible. To The Schroder Foundation, Selim K. Zilkha, Marina Kellen French and the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation, Nina von Maltzahn, and an anonymous donor, we are most grateful.

Julia Siemon

Introduction

The set of twelve silver-gilt standing cups known as the Aldobrandini Tazze is as mysterious as it is magnificent: although widely recognized as one of the greatest surviving monuments of Renaissance European silver, little or nothing is known of its early history.[1] The work's forthright luxury—the sheer quantity of precious metal involved in its making and the scope of its elaborate decoration—bespeaks a commission of major importance and no small expense. The subject matter, a flattering survey of the most famous rulers of ancient Rome, is similarly grandiose and implies association with a patron of the highest order.[2] These clear indications of prestige have inspired two centuries of speculation, yet no record of the set's origin has been discovered. Lacking, too, are the goldsmiths' marks that often appear on Renaissance silver, identifying the city where and date when an object was made and sometimes even the artist responsible. In the face of these documentary lacunae, the Aldobrandini Tazze must speak for themselves.

Together, the tazze form a work of remarkable narrative ambition, bringing to life the history of the first twelve Caesars as chronicled by the Roman writer Suetonius.[3] When correctly assembled, each tazza is composed of a shallow, footed dish surmounted by a figure of one of the Caesars; beneath the statuette, on the concave interior of each dish, four scenes from the life of the relevant ruler are chased in intricate relief. Across the tazze, these forty-eight discrete compositions construct a visual account spanning nearly 150 years of Roman history. The depictions range from sweeping views of ancient monuments to intimate glimpses into imperial life; they encompass raging battles, powerful omens, and glorious triumphs as well as quiet moments unrelated to major historical events. These individual scenes, carriers of the set's narrative content, ostensibly provide a glimpse into the ancient past. However, the vignettes, though based on Suetonius's *Lives*, have little to do with the Roman author's agenda. Instead, they are most revelatory of the particular Renaissance moment to which the tazze belong.

The vast amount of imagery featured on the tazze's four dozen individual compositions presents a challenge to anyone attempting a systematic study of its content—a task that until very recently was virtually impossible. The dishes were dispersed in the mid-nineteenth century and are currently housed in public and private collections across Europe and the Americas. In 2014, however, all twelve tazze were briefly reunited at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, where they underwent an extensive photographic campaign; the resulting images allow for examination of the narrative scenes in previously unimaginable detail.[4] These stunning photographs, made available to the public for the first time in this book, played an essential role in the research discussed in its pages and will doubtless inspire many future inquiries.

The bringing together of the Aldobrandini Tazze in 2014 represents a watershed moment in our understanding of the set; besides photography, the reunion made possible scientific testing, visual analysis, and the exchange of ideas. On June 18 and 19 of that year, an international, interdisciplinary team of specialists gathered at the Metropolitan Museum to see the tazze in person, discuss what little was known about them, and lay the groundwork for further investigation. Speakers and session chairs were Ellenor Alcorn, Denise Allen, Mary Beard, Michèle Bimbenet-Privat, Linda Borsch, Ian Campbell, Federico Carò, Wolfram Koeppe, Ashira Loike, Ernst-Ludwig Richter, Antonella Fabriani Rojas, Xavier F. Salomon, Timothy Schroder, William Stenhouse, Luke Syson, Pierre Terjanian, Ubaldo Vitali, Stefanie Walker, and Mark T. Wypyski.

They were joined in the symposium by collectors, curators, and other experts, including Kirstin Kennedy, Alexis Kugel, Robert Little, Carmen Espinosa Martín, Maria Mayer, Luisa Penalva, Stuart W. Pyhrr, Eike D. Schmidt, Pamela Smith, Femke Speelberg, Richard E. Stone, and Ginette Vagenheim. Discussions touched on questions of patronage, authorship, manufacture, use and display, iconography, provenance, and the significance of technical analysis. The present collection of essays, while not a compendium of symposium papers, emerges directly from these conversations. The contributors owe a significant debt of gratitude to all participants for their insights and to the lenders for generously facilitating the event.

Among the achievements of the symposium was the final resolution of a notorious case of mistaken identity. Since at least the mid-nineteenth century, scholarship had been hindered by difficulty in determining which dish goes with which emperor. In the following pages, all twelve of the dishes are correctly—and definitively—identified. The Caesar statuettes are impossible to confuse: the name of each appears engraved on its supporting pedestal.[5] However, the tazze were designed for easy disassembly. Each can be dismantled into multiple constituent elements (see diagram on p. 159), a convenient feature for storage or travel. Once detached from their (labeled) statuettes, the dishes can be difficult to identify with their matching emperors—the process requires a vigilant reading of Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. Unfortunately, these readily confused components are interchangeable across the set. By the end of the nineteenth century, only the Julius Caesar and Claudius figures and dishes remained correctly paired; all the other Caesar statuettes stood proudly above episodes from another ruler's history. Most still do.

In this book's first essay, Mary Beard describes her experience of discovering, during a visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, that what was purported to be the Domitian tazza was in fact a hybrid object composed of the Domitian statuette set above a dish wrought with scenes from the life of Tiberius. This revelation led to a trail of similar misidentifications, which were rectified once and for all when the Aldobrandini Tazze were brought to New York in 2014. At that time, the figures and dishes were temporarily restored to their correct configurations for the purpose of study and photography.

The process of reidentifying the dishes has revealed that their imagery is not merely based on Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, but that each of the four dozen narrative scenes can be linked to a specific passage in Suetonius's text. Those passages, newly translated by Mary Beard, are included in the present volume and shed much light on the meaning of the imagery. The need to "read" as well as look at the Aldobrandini Tazze has been acknowledged for centuries: a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century manuscript credited with describing all the scenes once accompanied the set.[6] This manuscript, lost since 1893, had forty-nine pages, a fact that seems to confirm its function as a guide to the forty-eight Suetonian images chased on the tazze. In her essay, Beard assesses the relationship between the set and its literary source material, drawing from research on Suetonius's treatment in Renaissance scholarship and visual arts. Unlike other period representations of the historical Twelve Caesars, the Aldobrandini Tazze provide an astutely edited version of Suetonius's text in order to create an entirely positive representation of imperial power. Once considered inscrutable or inconsequential, the Suetonian images on the Aldobrandini Tazze are now shown to participate in a sophisticated iconographic program and to demonstrate an astonishing level of antiquarian erudition.

The chased scenes on the tazze evoke the ancient world through the discerning deployment of imagery gathered from portable visual sources such as prints, books, and coins. This book's second essay posits the involvement of a learned antiquarian scholar in the production of the tazze and attempts to understand the role of this collaborator in the planning and design of the narrative scenes.

The choice of references and the skill with which they are integrated connect the Aldobrandini Tazze to the highest echelons of late Renaissance antiquarian discourse. Examination of these borrowings also brings into focus the artistic character of the several goldsmiths who chased the dishes—members of an enormously talented team whose work strongly suggests training in Northern Europe. Each dish seems to have been wrought by a single chaser, but multiple hands are discernible across the set. None of the imagery exhibits evidence of firsthand experience of Rome or even of Italy. Analysis carried out in the second essay suggests that the Aldobrandini Tazze were made north of the Alps no earlier than about 1587–89, with the terminus post quem supplied by one of the visual sources.

The first known documentary reference to the Aldobrandini Tazze dates to approximately ten years later. Antonella Fabriani Rojas recently discovered two letters that place six of the twelve tazze on the market in Milan in the spring of 1599. The letters also reveal that at least one tazza had been in Ferrara at some prior point. Another early reference newly uncovered by Fabriani Rojas appears in a letter written in Rome in 1604. The information it conveys seems to confirm that the tazze were never owned by the Este family, who ruled Ferrara until early 1598, when Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini took control of the duchy in the name of the church. (The three letters are transcribed in Appendix A.) Previously, the earliest records of the tazze were those discovered by Stefanie Walker, which chronicle Cardinal Pietro's purchase of half of the set in Milan in 1602. These documents confirm beyond a doubt that Cardinal Pietro was not the original patron of the Aldobrandini Tazze.

In the third essay, information gathered from these earliest records informs a close study of the tazze's imperial iconography, providing the basis for a hypothesis of the set's origins. The author proposes that the Aldobrandini Tazze were made in the Habsburg Netherlands in the 1590s, a moment when the region's intellectual culture and political emphasis on imperial symbolism seem especially conducive to the undertaking. Comparison with other Habsburg antiquarian projects suggests that the tazze could have been designed with the Austrian archdukes (Habsburg-installed governors of the Southern Netherlands) in mind, and examination of archival records indicates that the tazze would not have been out of place among the precious gifts traditionally offered to local sovereigns. With support from period documents, it is argued that in the fall of 1598, Archduke Albert of Austria might have brought the tazze with him to Ferrara, where he celebrated his wedding to Isabella Clara Eugenia, the Infanta of Spain, and that he might have presented six of the tazze as a gift of gratitude to his host, Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini. The particular circumstances of the wedding and the archduke's trip through northern Italy offer a possible explanation for the peculiarities of the earliest records of the tazze and their acquisition by the cardinal.

In the sixteenth century, objects fashioned from silver were often used as tokens to commemorate important occasions and solidify political relationships. In his essay, Wolfram Koeppe examines this tradition in Northern Europe, considering the few well-documented examples that survive. In particular, he relates the Aldobrandini Tazze to a genre of narrative silver gifts—works that, though they take the form of tableware, are in reality commemorative mementos chased in low relief with historical scenes. A proposal arguing for a Netherlandish origin for the tazze is supported by the fact that the three most important extant examples of this genre, which offer the closest stylistic parallels to the chasing on the tazze, were all made in the Netherlands. There is little remaining Northern Renaissance silver with which to compare the Aldobrandini Tazze, but Koeppe demonstrates that the set's highly classicizing features do not in themselves preclude Northern manufacture.

The standing cup was a popular form in the sixteenth century, produced throughout Europe. The shape, derived from ancient drinking vessels, was adapted in the Renaissance for serving food as well. Period images

depict tazze being used as wine glasses and also as dishes for fruit, sweets, and other delicacies. In her essay, Michèle Bimbenet-Privat offers a history of the standing cup, noting how the Aldobrandini Tazze, with the Caesar figures mounted at the center of the dishes, vary from the standard tazza form but are related to the type of extravagant decorations routinely created for important Renaissance feasts. Other tazze, however, seem to have been intended solely for display, whether exhibited on a buffet in a grand dining hall or as one of many luxurious items gathered in a private *Kunstkammer.* Considering sixteenth-century display and dining practices as well as records concerning the use of the Aldobrandini Tazze in the following century, Bimbenet-Privat provides context for understanding the significance and intended function of the set.

The remaining four essays in the book are concerned less with the origin of the Aldobrandini Tazze than with their later history. The first known reference to all twelve tazze occurs in 1603, in the silver inventory of Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, where it was first spotted by Stefanie Walker. A transcription of the inventory, painstakingly prepared by Walker, appears in Appendix C. The publication of the inventory is a vital contribution to the study of Renaissance silver, of which only a tiny percentage survives. To date, the Aldobrandini Tazze are the only extant items of goldsmiths' work that have been connected to Cardinal Pietro. However, in her essay, Walker uses the inventory to conjure an idea of the scale and scope of the cardinal's collection and the place the Aldobrandini Tazze would have held within it. Moreover, Pietro's tastes and priorities are illuminated through comparisons of his silver holdings with those of other major Roman collectors of his time.

Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini bequeathed the tazze to his sister. Xavier F. Salomon charts the history of the tazze in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, beginning with Cardinal Pietro's purchase of six tazze in 1602. Salomon examines the role of silver at important events hosted by the Aldobrandini family and explains how, after the cardinal's death in 1621, the tazze became part of an important family legacy. Upon the death of his sister, the tazze were inherited by her descendants, including members of the Borghese, Pamphilj, and Doria Pamphilj families. The last record of the tazze in Italy is a document issued in 1769 marking the return of their ownership to the Borghese family. It seems most likely, Salomon explains, that the set was sold out of Italy before 1792. In the late eighteenth century, most noble collections of silver in Rome were decimated by papal and Napoleonic campaigns to reclaim precious metal.

There is a gap of more than fifty years between the last record of the Aldobrandini Tazze in Rome and their next appearance, in the shop of a London dealer and silversmith, in 1826. In the penultimate essay, Ellenor Alcorn and Timothy Schroder consider the responses engendered by the tazze in the nineteenth century. The set caused a great stir among artists, dealers, and collectors, and some of its features were modified to suit contemporary tastes. Electrotype copies of the dishes were made, and the emperor figures were replicated in bronze. At some point between 1862 and 1872, before the set was dispersed, the tazze were gilded. Several entered the collections of Europe's wealthiest collectors, but six of the tazze—those acquired by the Parisian dealer Frédéric Spitzer—had their fluted feet replaced with more elaborate substitutes of an unknown derivation.

These changes and the way they relate to the original structure of the tazze are addressed by Linda Borsch, Federico Carò, and Mark T. Wypyski in the book's final essay. Borsch and her coauthors consider the current state of the objects and what can be learned about their history through the use of the most advanced scientific research in combination with careful visual analysis. Specialized testing provides important information regarding the composition of the metal, and X-ray radiographs reveal areas of alteration and offer insights into the mode of manufacture. The essay offers a clear explanation of the sophisticated research that

has been done and a careful overview of the objects' condition.

The authors of this volume, never expecting to resolve all of the set's obscurities, have approached the Aldobrandini Tazze as an invitation to challenge conventional assumptions. Informed by new archival research, technical analyses, and stunning photography, each essay explores the tazze from a different scholarly perspective. The result is a collaboration that maps new territory in our understanding of Renaissance metalwork and its reception as well as in our conception of the Renaissance more broadly.

Julia Siemon

1 John F. Hayward's assessment is typical: "Of the few services of Renaissance silver that have survived intact until the present day, the most imposing in size, design and quality of execution is [the Aldobrandini Tazze]." Hayward 1970, p. 669.
2 Ibid., p. 674.
3 Suetonius 1980.
4 We are grateful to Barbara Bridgers, General Manager for Imaging and Photography, for her dedication to this project, and to Joseph Coscia Jr. and Juan Trujillo, who carried out the photography.
5 These labels may not be original, but no reason has been found to doubt their accuracy.
6 For discussions of this missing manuscript, see Beard, p. 45, and Appendix B, p. 175, in this volume.

Plates

The Aldobrandini Tazze are presented in the sequence of the Suetonian histories represented on the dishes. Owing to the mismatched components on certain of the tazze, their Caesar statuettes appear out of chronological order. (See fig. 1, p. 159 for a diagram of the components.) The plates of the complete tazze are followed by closeups of the dishes and excerpts newly translated by Mary Beard from *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, by C. Suetonius Tranquillus.

1. Julius Caesar figure and dish, replaced foot

Figure and dish: anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Foot: anonymous, added after the mid-19th century
Gilt silver, H. 17¾ in. (45 cm), weight 2,702.3 g
Marks and inscription: *IULIVS* incised on top of pedestal cap; 19th-century control marks
Museo Lázaro Galdiano, Madrid (014530)

2. Nero figure, Augustus dish, fluted foot

Anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Gilt silver, H. 15⅝ in. (39.7 cm), weight 2,843.7 g
Marks and inscriptions: *NERO* incised on top of pedestal cap; *Augustus* scratched twice on underside of dish; *AUGVSTVS Z* scratched on underside of disk; 19th-century control marks
Zilkha Collection, Los Angeles

3. Domitian figure, Tiberius dish, replaced foot

Figure and dish: anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Foot: anonymous, added after the mid-19th century
Gilt silver, H. 16¼ in. (41.4 cm), weight 2,914.5 g
Marks and inscriptions: *DOMITIANVS* incised on top of pedestal cap (the letter *N* is reversed); *VESPASIANVS 10* scratched on underside of disk (the *N* is reversed); 19th-century control marks
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Dr. W. L. Hildburgh Bequest (M.247-1956)

4. Galba figure, Caligula dish, fluted foot

Anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Gilt silver, H. 16⅞ in. (43 cm), weight 2,982 g
Marks and inscriptions: *GALBA* incised on top of pedestal cap; *Domitian* scratched on underside of dish; *GALBA* scratched on underside of disk; 19th-century control marks
Casa-Museu Medeiros e Almeida, Lisbon (FMA 1183)

5. Claudius figure and dish, fluted foot

Anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Gilt silver, H. 15⅞ in. (40.4 cm), weight 2,701.1 g
Marks and inscriptions: *CLAUDIVS* incised on top of pedestal cap; *Claudius* scratched on underside of dish; *CLAUDIUS* scratched on underside of disk; 19th-century control marks
Private collection, on loan to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (L.1999.62.1)

6. Tiberius figure, Nero dish, fluted foot

Anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Gilt silver, H. 16½ in. (41.9 cm), weight 2,949.8 g
Marks and inscriptions: *TIWERIVS* incised on top of pedestal cap; *Nero* and *NERO 6* scratched on underside of dish; *Nero* engraved on underside of dish; *VITELIUS 9* scratched on underside of disk; 19th-century control marks
Private collection, on loan to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (L.1999.62.2)

7. Caligula figure, Galba dish, fluted foot

Anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Gilt silver, H. 17 in. (43.1 cm), weight 2,942.5 g
Marks and inscriptions: *CALIGVLA* incised on top of pedestal cap; *Galba* scratched on underside of dish; *CALIGVLA* scratched on underside of disk; Aldobrandini coat of arms pricked on underside of dish; 19th-century control marks
Schroder Collection, London

8. Otho figure and dish, replaced foot

Figure and dish: anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Foot: anonymous, added after the mid-19th century
Gilt silver, H. 15⅝ in. (39.8 cm), weight 2,718.7 g
Marks and inscriptions: *OTHO* incised on top of pedestal cap; *Otho* scratched twice on underside of dish; Aldobrandini coat of arms pricked on underside of dish; 19th-century control marks
Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, from the Collection of Viscount and Viscountess Lee of Fareham, given in trust by the Massey Foundation (997.158.151)

9. Vitellius figure and dish, replaced foot

Figure and dish: anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Foot: anonymous, added after the mid-19th century
Gilt silver, H. 16⅛ in. (41.1 cm), weight 2,797.6 g
Marks and inscriptions: *VITELLIVS* incised on pedestal cap; star over letter *M* within a shield struck on threaded surface of baluster stem; Aldobrandini coat of arms pricked on underside of dish; 19th-century control marks
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund 1945 (45.60.58a–h)

10. Vespasian figure and dish, replaced foot

Figure and dish: anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Foot: anonymous, added after the mid-19th century
Gilt silver, H. 15⅛ in. (38.5 cm), weight 2,816.1 g
Marks and inscriptions: *VESPASIANVS* incised on top of pedestal cap (the letter *N* is reversed); *Caligula* scratched on underside of dish; *TIBERIVS* 3 scratched on underside of disk; Aldobrandini coat of arms pricked on upper surface of dish; 19th-century control marks
Private collection, London

11. Titus dish

Anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Gilt silver, Diam. 14¾ in. (37.6 cm), weight 1,060.7 g
Marks and inscription: Aldobrandini coat of arms engraved on upper surface of dish; *TITVS* scratched on underside of dish
Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon (1018 Our)

12. Augustus figure, Domitian dish, replaced fluted foot

Figure and dish: anonymous (Netherlandish?), ca. 1587–99
Foot: anonymous, added after the mid-19th century
Gilt silver, H. 15½ in. (39.5 cm), weight 2,776.6 g
Marks and inscriptions: *AVGVSTVS* incised on top of pedestal cap; *Vespasian* scratched on underside of dish; Aldobrandini coat of arms pricked on underside of dish; 19th-century control marks
Minneapolis Institute of Art, The James Ford Bell Family Foundation Fund, The M.R. Schweitzer Fund, and The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund (75.54)

13. Titus figure, Titus electrotype dish, replaced foot

Figure: anonymous, copy of the Julius Caesar figure, made after the mid-19th century
Dish: anonymous, electrotype copy of the Titus dish, made after the mid-19th century
Foot: anonymous, added after the mid-19th century
Gilt silver, H. 16½ in. (41.9 cm), weight 3,313.8 g
Marks and inscriptions: *TITVS* incised on top of pedestal cap; star over letter *M* within a shield struck on threaded surface of baluster stem; 19th-century control marks
Private collection

Julius Caesar dish

I

II

I. "He also attacked the Britons, a people previously unknown, and once he had conquered them, he demanded from them money and hostages. . . . In Britain his fleet was almost destroyed by a violent storm." Suetonius 25

II. "Overtaking his cohorts at the river Rubicon, which was the boundary of his province, he stopped for a while, and reflecting on what a vast undertaking it was, turning to those next to him, said, 'Even now we can go back; but once we have crossed that little bridge, then everything is up to the sword.' As he hesitated, an omen was produced: a man of extraordinary size and handsomeness suddenly appeared, sitting nearby, playing on a pipe; when not only shepherds rushed to hear him, but also many of the soldiers leaving their posts, including trumpeters, the apparition grabbed a trumpet from one of them and rushed up to the river, and raising the battle cry with a huge blast strode across to the opposite bank. Then Caesar said, 'Let's go where the omens of the gods and the treachery of our enemies beckon. The dice has been thrown.'" Suetonius 31–32

III

IV

III. “Blockading Pompey for almost four months with vast siege works, he finally routed him at the Battle of Pharsalus.” Suetonius 35

IV. “On the day of his triumph over Gaul, as he passed through the Velabrum he was nearly tossed out of his chariot when the axle broke, and he went up the Capitoline Hill by torchlight, with forty elephants holding lamps to right and left.” Suetonius 37

Augustus dish

I

II

I. "He went over to the side of the aristocrats [*optimates*] who he realized hated Antony, especially because he was besieging Decimus Brutus at Mutina . . . he finished off the war which had been entrusted to him within a period of three months in two battles. In the first, Antony writes that he took flight and eventually appeared again after two days minus his cloak and horse. But it is generally agreed that in what followed he took the responsibilities not only of a leader, but also of a soldier, and that in the middle of the fighting, when the standard-bearer had been badly injured, he took the eagle on his own shoulders and for a long time carried it." Suetonius 10

II. "Not long after he defeated Antony in a naval battle at Actium . . . Cleopatra was believed to have died from the bite of an asp . . . [and] he enlarged the ancient temple of Apollo [on the site of his camp]." Suetonius 17–18

III

IV

III. “The Temple of Janus Quirinus, which had been closed only twice before his time since the foundation of the city, he closed three times in a much shorter period, when peace had been established on land and sea.” Suetonius 22

IV. “He held three full triumphs, for victories in Dalmatia, at Actium, and at Alexandria, on three successive days.” Suetonius 22

Tiberius dish

I

II

I. “Leaving [Sparta] by night, he very nearly lost his life when flames suddenly burst out from the woods all along the way and engulfed the whole party, to the extent that part of Livia’s clothes and hair was singed.” Suetonius 6

II. “Then he waged war against the Raeti and Vindelici . . . and in that war he subdued the Alpine peoples.” Suetonius 9

III

IV

III. “Before he turned to drive up onto the Capitoline Hill, he got down from the chariot and dropped to his knees in front of his father [the emperor Augustus], who was presiding over the ceremony.” Suetonius 20

IV. “He did not relieve the provinces either with any act of generosity, with the exception of the province of Asia, after its cities had been ruined in an earthquake.” Suetonius 48

Caligula dish

I

II

I. "How much love and affection he enjoyed among the soldiers, thanks to being brought up in their company, is best seen by what happened when they were on the brink of mutiny after the death of Augustus and rushing headlong into madness. Without a doubt, he alone—just the sight of him—calmed them down. For they didn't stop until they noticed that he was being evacuated because of the danger of the uprising and taken to the safety of the next town. Then finally, turning to remorse, they held up his carriage and stopped it, and begged to be let off the disgrace that was facing them." Suetonius 9

II. "Artabanus, the king of the Parthians, who had always been open about his hatred and contempt for Tiberius, voluntarily sought his [Caligula's] friendship and came to a conference with the provincial governor; and crossing the Euphrates he paid homage to the eagles and Roman standards and to the statues of the emperors." Suetonius 14

III

IV

III. “On two occasions he gave the people a handout of three hundred sesterces each.” Suetonius 17

IV. “Besides this, he dreamt up a new and unheard-of kind of spectacle. For he bridged the gap between Baiae and the harbor works at Puteoli, a distance of just over three and one-half miles, by bringing in merchants’ boats from everywhere and anchoring them in a double row, then piling a mound of earth on top, making a straight line like the Appian Way. He marched over this bridge, from one end to the other, for two whole days, on the first riding a horse in all its battle trappings, conspicuous in his wreath of oak leaves, with a shield and a sword, and a golden breastplate.” Suetonius 19

Claudius dish

I

II

I. “He began his political career under Gaius [Caligula] and held the consulship along with him for two months, and it so happened that when he went into the Forum for the first time with the rods of office, an eagle that was flying by came to rest on his right shoulder.” Suetonius 7

II. “These men put him in a litter, and because his own servants had fled, they took it in turns to carry him and brought him, frightened and despairing, to the military base.” Suetonius 10

III

IV

III. “He built the harbor at Ostia with curved breakwaters to right and left, and with a mole set in deep water at the entrance. In order to give it a stronger foundation, he first of all sank the ship in which the great obelisk had been brought from Alexandria, then using piles to secure it he built a tall tower on top of it, like the Pharos of Alexandria, so that boats could find their way in by the lights that blazed at night.” Suetonius 20

IV. “He celebrated a magnificent triumph. And he allowed not only provincial governors to come to Rome to witness the spectacle, but also some exiles. . . . His wife Messalina followed the chariot in a carriage, and following too were those who had won triumphal decorations in the same war, all of them on foot and wearing purple bordered togas, except for Marcus Crassus Frugi, who rode a horse with ceremonial trappings and a costume decorated with palms, because it was the second time he had received the honor.” Suetonius 17

Nero dish

I

II

I. "I would also reasonably include among the spectacles he gave the entrance of Tiridates into the city. He was the king of Armenia, encouraged to come by generous promises. . . . [Nero] produced him at the first opportunity he could, putting armed cohorts around the temples of the Forum, while he sat on his official chair on the *Rostra*, wearing the costume of a triumphing general, with military standards and symbols all around him. And as Tiridates came up the sloping ramp, Nero let him fall at his knees, then raised him up with his right hand and kissed him. Then in response to the king's request, he took the turban off his head and put a diadem in its place." Suetonius 13

II. "Although he had a feeble and husky voice, he was keen to appear on stage . . . and he first appeared at Naples, where—even though the theater was suddenly struck by an earthquake—he did not stop singing until he had finished the tune he had begun. In the same place, he performed frequently and for days on end. . . . When he reckoned it was important to sing at Rome too, he replayed the contest of the Neronia before the appointed day . . . but when the military guard, which was then on duty, supported the pleas of the people, he promised voluntarily that he would appear straightaway." Suetonius 20–21

III

IV

III. "Through six days and seven nights, there was terrible destruction, while the people were forced to take shelter in monuments and tombs. . . . Looking at this blaze from the tower of Maecenas, he rejoiced, so he said, 'in the beauty of the fire,' and he sang 'The Fall of Troy' in that stage costume of his." Suetonius 38

IV. "[Nero rode] in the very chariot that Augustus had once upon a time used to celebrate his triumphs, wearing purple robes, with a cloak decorated with golden stars, carrying the crown from the Olympic Games on his head, and from the Pythian Games in his right hand. A procession went in front of him, carrying placards detailing his other successes: where he had won, against whom, and what the subjects of the winning songs or plays were. Following the chariot came his cheerleaders according to the custom of such celebrations, and they called out that they were the emperor's men and the soldiers of his triumph. Then going through the arch in the Circus Maximus, which was torn down, and on through the Velabrum and the Forum, he made his way to the Palatine and the Temple of Apollo. Everywhere he went, animals were killed in sacrifice, lots of perfume was sprinkled onto the streets, and he was showered with birds, ribbons, and sweets." Suetonius 25

Galba dish

I

II

I. “An omen was given to his grandfather when—as he was sacrificing to avert the danger of lightning—an eagle had snatched the entrails from his hands and taken them off to an oak tree loaded with acorns: it meant that supreme power, even if late coming, was predicted for his family.” Suetonius 4

II. “And it so happened that, when he was sacrificing within a temple precinct after arriving in his province [Spain], the hair on the head of a young attendant who was holding an incense box suddenly went completely white; and there were some who interpreted this as meaning a change of power and that an old man would succeed to a young one, that is Galba himself to Nero.” Suetonius 8

III

IV

III. “Not long after, lightning struck a lake in Cantabria and twelve axes were found in it, an unmistakable sign of supreme power.” Suetonius 8

IV. “[T]hinking that it was not so much his old age as his childlessness that was held against him, he suddenly took Piso Frugi Licinianus out of the crowd of those who had come to greet him one morning, a distinguished and well-bred young man, one of his long-term favorites, and forever appointed him in his will as the heir to his property and name. Calling him his son, he took him to the military base and adopted him in front of the assembled soldiers.” Suetonius 17

Otho dish

I

II

I. "Letting go no opportunity of attention or flattery to anyone, whenever he entertained the emperor at dinner, he doled out gold coins to each of the men of the cohort on guard duty, and equally put all the soldiers in his debt one way or another." Suetonius 4

II. "Then quickly getting into the kind of closed sedan chair that women use, he made for the military base; but when the bearers began to flag, he got out and ran. . . ." Suetonius 6

III

IV

III. "In the last and greatest battle, he was defeated at Bedriacum by a trick. A promise of a conference was made, but when the soldiers were led out on the assumption that they were to discuss peace, they were unexpectedly made to fight, just as they were greeting the enemy." Suetonius 9

IV. "My father used to say that . . . he was then induced to disregard his own survival thanks to the example of an ordinary soldier. This man convinced no one when he announced the defeat of the army, but was accused at one minute of lying, at another of cowardice, as if he had deserted the battle; so he fell on his sword in front of Otho's feet. . . . In the end, waking up at dawn, he stabbed himself with a single stroke below his left breast. . . ." Suetonius 10, 11

Vitellius dish

I

II

I. “[He] was hailed emperor by the soldiers and carried round the most populous villages, brandishing the sword that had belonged to Julius Caesar, which someone had taken from the Temple of Mars and had offered to him in the first moment of congratulations.” Suetonius 8

II. “As soon as the murder of Galba was announced, settling affairs in Germany he divided his forces into two, to send on one-half against Otho, the other to lead himself. The division that was sent on received a lucky omen, for an eagle suddenly flew toward them from the right-hand side and, surveying their standards, slowly went in front of them as they made their way.” Suetonius 9

III

IV

III. “Soon after, as he was giving legal judgments on the tribunal at Vienna, a rooster came and stood on his shoulder, and then on his head.” Suetonius 9

IV. “Finally he entered the city of Rome to the sound of trumpets, in military uniform and armed with a sword, amidst standards and banners, while his staff wore cloaks, and his soldiers had their weapons on show.” Suetonius 11

Vespasian dish

I

II

I. "Vespasian himself was chosen to put down this [Jewish] rebellion. . . . So two legions, eight cavalry units, and ten cohorts were added to his forces, and his elder son [Titus] was taken along as one of his officers . . . and he straightaway reformed military discipline and fought one or two battles with great courage." Suetonius 4

II. "Once when he [Vespasian] was taking breakfast, a stray dog brought in a human hand from the crossroads and dropped it under the table. On another occasion when he was dining, an ox that was plowing shook off its yoke and burst into his dining room. It made the servants run away when, as if suddenly exhausted, it fell at Vespasian's very feet as he was reclining and bowed its head." Suetonius 5

III

IV

III. “An ordinary man who was blind and another who was lame approached him together as he sat on the tribunal. They begged for help for their ailments as had been promised by Serapis: that Vespasian would heal the eyes of one if he spat on them, and would give strength to the leg of the other if he deigned to touch it with his heel. He had no confidence that his healing would succeed and so did not dare even to try, but when finally his friends urged him on, he made an attempt on both, openly in front of a crowd. And it worked.” Suetonius 7

IV. “Returning to the city as such a hero and with such a great reputation, he celebrated a triumph over the Jews.” Suetonius 8

Titus dish

I

II

I. "Left behind to finish the conquest of Judaea, in the final assault on Jerusalem he killed twelve defenders with the strike of as many arrows, and he took the city on his daughter's birthday." Suetonius 5

II. "On his way to Alexandria he wore a diadem in consecrating the Apis bull at Memphis according to the custom and ritual of that ancient religion. But there were some who interpreted the [royal] diadem unfavorably." Suetonius 5

III

IV

III. “He took part in the triumph of his father.” Suetonius 6

IV. “When his amphitheater was dedicated, and the baths hastily built next to it, he gave a most lavish and expensive display of gladiators and wild beasts.” Suetonius 8

Domitian dish

I

II

I. "In the war with Vitellius he fled to the Capitol with his uncle Sabinus and a detachment of the troops who were in the city, and when the enemy were bursting in and the temple was on fire, he spent the night in hiding with the temple caretaker." Suetonius 1

II. "He gave magnificent and extravagant displays not only in the amphitheater but also in the circus, where in addition to the regular races of two-horse and four-horse chariots, he presented two battles, one of infantry, one of cavalry." Suetonius 4

III

IV

III. “On three occasions, he gave a handout to the people of three hundred sesterces each.” Suetonius 4

IV. “After battles waged with different degrees of success, he celebrated a double triumph over the Chatti and the Dacians.” Suetonius 6

Mary Beard

Suetonius, the Silver Caesars, and Mistaken Identities

My First Encounter with the Tazze

In the fall of 2010, I first came face-to-face with one of the so-called Aldobrandini Tazze. I was a few months into a new research project on images of the Twelve Caesars in Renaissance and later art, and I already had a sense of the importance of this extraordinary set of sixteenth-century silverware. Here was a Renaissance re-creation of those first twelve Roman rulers, from Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.) to Domitian (A.D. 51–96), a portrait gallery of dynasts in miniature, their names clearly inscribed at their feet. But even more interesting for me, each dynast was attached to a dish decorated with four intricately chased scenes illustrating his reign, every episode taken from the biographies written by C. Suetonius Tranquillus, born about A.D. 70. Suetonius, as we now usually call him, was the Roman writer who, through his set of twelve *Lives*, bequeathed to the world the very idea of the Twelve Caesars, as well as some of the most memorable and lurid anecdotes about them.[1] The tazze have a good claim to be the earliest surviving systematic attempt to illustrate Suetonius's text.[2]

I had also picked up some hints about the intriguing complexity of the story of the tazze—how over the centuries they had been sold off, lost, disconnected, dispersed across the globe, and their parts so mixed up that several of the detachable imperial figures had landed on the "wrong" dishes, accompanied by scenes from the "wrong" imperial lives. But the Victoria and Albert Museum in London was supposed to have one of these objects in its original state—the figure of the notorious Roman tyrant Domitian standing on a dish that, at least since the late nineteenth century, had been identified as "his," decorated with scenes from his *Life*.[3] So I went to take a closer look.

The encounter was more surprising than I had anticipated. I watched with a mixture of awe and astonishment as expert curators donned their gloves and gently disassembled the thing. The figure of Domitian unscrewed so easily that it instantly became much clearer how the emperors could have migrated from dish to dish: once the statuettes were unscrewed, you would have to look very carefully at the details of the scenes to make sure that each one ended up back on his "right" dish. But there was a bigger surprise, and the start of a curious historical detective story, when I tried to match up the chased scenes on the dish with the text of Suetonius's *Life of Domitian*.

It was a triumphal procession that first caught my eye (Tiberius III, p. 13). According to the museum's documentation, one of the scenes represented Domitian's celebration of his rather overblown military success against German tribes, mentioned by Suetonius[4] ("after battles fought with different degrees of success, he celebrated a double triumph over the Chatti and the Dacians"[5]). A triumphal procession does indeed stand out on the dish, and it includes many precise details of the ceremony as it was usually performed. The shape of the special ceremonial chariot reflects Renaissance scholarship on that subject, learning based on careful study of ancient descriptions and depictions of the ritual, and the animals to be sacrificed carry their correct Roman ornaments. But there is one strikingly unorthodox feature: the chariot itself is empty. The victorious general, in military dress and wearing the triumphal laurel

wreath, has brought the vehicle to a halt along the ceremonial route and dismounted in order to kneel in front of a seated figure attended by twelve official guards (or lictors), each holding a bundle of fasces—the rods of office that were the symbol of official Roman power (fig. 1). This can only be the occasion when, in A.D. 12—almost seven decades before the reign of Domitian—the future emperor Tiberius included an unprecedented gesture in the celebration of his victories in Germany. In the words of Suetonius's *Life of Tiberius*, "Before he turned to drive up onto the Capitoline Hill, he got down from the chariot and dropped to his knees in front of his father [the emperor Augustus], who was presiding over the ceremony."[6] It was for Roman readers a sure sign of the appropriate deference of Tiberius, as heir, to the ruling emperor, and for me a sure sign that, whatever was claimed, the dish could not possibly "belong" to Domitian.

That was quickly confirmed by the other three scenes, which also turned out to derive from the *Life of Tiberius* and had nothing to do with Domitian. One was as glaringly misidentified as the scene of triumph. It had been interpreted as Domitian's wife traveling in Germany, where her husband was on campaign (Tiberius I, p. 12). But this is not only difficult to match up to the narrative of Suetonius, who in his *Life of Domitian* hardly refers to Domitia at all, and certainly not in Germany; it also fails to explain why on earth the woman in question is almost on fire (the convention here for representing flames being the same as on other dishes) and carrying a baby. The scene must represent the incident, described by Suetonius, involving the infant Tiberius and his mother, Livia, when they were on the run in Greece during the civil wars that followed the assassination of Julius Caesar: "Leaving [Sparta] by night, he very nearly lost his life when flames suddenly burst out from the woods all along the way and engulfed the whole party to the extent that part of Livia's clothes and hair was singed."[7]

Of the other two scenes, one pictured a rare instance of Tiberius's liberality (Tiberius IV, p. 13). Meanness was this emperor's usual trait, but after an earthquake in the province of Asia in A.D. 17, he sponsored relief measures and gave generous subsidies to the cities of the area. On one side of a river, we see the emperor, with his lictors behind him, receiving petitions from the local population; on the other side, buildings are toppling from the force of the quake.[8] This vignette had been masquerading as Domitian receiving the submission of the Germans, but that hardly explained the collapsing buildings. The remaining scene seems, at first sight, a generic image of battle between Roman forces and their enemies under the watchful eye of a splendid river god reclining next to his streaming waters (Tiberius II, p. 12). This had been identified as another episode from Domitian's German campaigns. But the clear references to Tiberius on the rest of the dish suggest instead that it is a scene from *his* German campaigns, almost certainly his defeat of the Raeti and Vindelici in southern Germany in 15 B.C.[9] One tiny detail of the design

Fig. 1. Detail of Tiberius III (p. 13) showing the triumphant future emperor kneeling before his father, Augustus

more or less clinches it: the pinecone, the traditional symbol of the Bavarian city of Augsburg, shown on a couple of the German standards (fig. 2). This emblem has often been taken as a clue to the place of the tazze's manufacture, on the assumption that patriotic craftsmen had smuggled in a subtle reference to their own hometown.[10] But whether that is true or not, the pinecone image is a clear pointer to the location of the campaign (Roman Augsburg—or Augusta Vindelicorum—eventually became the capital of the Roman province of Raetia) and may hint again at Tiberius himself, for according to tradition, it was he who during that war established the town as a Roman base.[11]

There is more to this story than a simple case of mistaken identity, of the life of Tiberius being misread as the life of Domitian. For a start, there is a piquant irony in the present combination of emperor and dish in the Victoria and Albert Museum that goes back only to 1956. When the tazza first entered the museum (originally on loan) in 1927, it displayed the figure of the emperor Vitellius above what was then taken to be Domitian's dish. The combination we now see was the result of a well-meaning international collaboration between three museums, each of which owned one of the original twelve tazze and was keen to reunite the right emperors with their dishes. The figure of Vitellius from London was sent to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to stand above the Vitellius dish in place of the "wrong" figure of Otho; the Metropolitan Museum sent the figure of Otho to the Royal Ontario Museum to rejoin its original dish; while the Royal Ontario Museum sent its figure of Domitian to the V&A to preside over the "Domitian" dish. The only trouble was that—as it wasn't really the Domitian dish at all—the V&A's tazza remained just as mongrel as it had been before. Despite all the excellent intentions, in this case one wrong emperor had been swapped for another.[12]

Fig. 2. Detail of Tiberius II (p. 12) depicting standards emblazoned with the image of a pinecone, symbol of the city of Augsburg

There is also the obvious domino effect. If the so-called Domitian dish really "belonged" to Tiberius, where did that leave the so-called Tiberius dish in Lisbon, which had been at some point wrongly attached to the figure of Galba (3 B.C.–A.D. 69)? The answer to that question exposed another series of misidentifications, not far short of farce. It did not take long to see that Galba was actually standing on top of the dish that depicted the deeds of Caligula (A.D. 12–41). Thanks to some truly astonishing wishful thinking, the notorious stunt in which Caligula pranced on horseback over a bridge of boats joining Baiae and Puteoli, the neighboring port on the Bay of Naples, had been interpreted as the retirement of Tiberius to the island of Capri (Caligula IV, p. 15). And a famous incident in which, as a toddler and army mascot, Caligula managed to shame Roman soldiers out of mutinying (they repented when they realized the tiny prince was being taken away to safety) had been squeezed to fit a scene from Tiberius's

German campaigns (Caligula I, p. 14).[13] Meanwhile, in the final piece of the puzzle, what had been taken to be the Caligula dish at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, wrongly attached to the figure of Augustus, proved to be that elusive Domitian dish. The drastic misreading in this case involved the scene of the burning Capitol (Domitian I, p. 30). According to Suetonius, in the civil war at the start of Vespasian's reign (r. 69–79) the emperor's young son Domitian barely escaped Rome with his life.[14] To fit the Caligula narrative, the scene had been construed as an image of the popular disturbances that followed the death of the future emperor's father, Germanicus.

These confusions have dogged the history of the tazze over the last century, and, as I shall suggest, probably much longer. But, errors though they are, they point to bigger questions about the iconography of the scenes on the dishes and the cultural background and literary tradition underlying them, to which I now turn. What was the "Suetonian tradition" that we see represented and so often misinterpreted in these extraordinary chasings? What reading of Suetonius do the Aldobrandini Tazze offer us? How typical was it of sixteenth-century readings more generally? And why has this unique collection of silverware been so susceptible to misidentification, disaggregation, and sheer muddle?

Suetonius and His Caesars

Suetonius is now most widely known for his racy tales of the iniquity of the first Roman emperors and their courts. Included in his sequence of twelve *Lives of the Caesars*, these accounts are still re-created in novels, movies, and popular history with a familiar mixture of horror, amusement, and titillation. It is thanks to these *Lives* that we know, or *think* we know, about Tiberius's sex antics in his swimming pool on Capri and Caligula's rumored (and unfulfilled) plans to make his favorite horse a consul.[15] But to focus only on this gossip—as if it were no more than gossip—is to underestimate Suetonius. It is true that some ancient writers themselves could be critical of the kind of trivial anecdotes found in his work. For example, writing about a century after Suetonius, the historian Cassius Dio reflected on the story of the young Domitian impaling flies on his stylus as a pastime—one of the most colorful passages in the Suetonian *Life*. Dio judged it beneath the dignity of true history writing, even though he did "feel obliged" also to record it himself.[16] Overall, however, there is more historical, literary, and political expertise in Suetonius's writing than has been regularly acknowledged.[17]

Suetonius had one great advantage in writing the life stories of emperors: having been a senior official in the palace administration, including posts as head librarian, archivist, and general secretary to the emperor from about A.D. 115 to the early 120s, he had firsthand experience of how the Roman imperial court worked.[18] A scholar as much as a bureaucrat, he had used his privileged access to the equivalent of the imperial filing cabinets to take copies of some of the emperors' private correspondence, which are included verbatim in the earlier *Lives* in the series. What is more, when he does cite the apparently trivial details of the emperors' personal habits—from sexual preferences to dining choices—it is often as a way of exploring the ethical basis of their rule. Some of those details may well be, in our terms, flagrantly unreliable, based on the hearsay of the palace corridors rather than documents from the archive and on biased stories that circulated posthumously rather than on contemporary evidence. But even so, they were deployed by Suetonius to scrutinize the nature of autocratic power. What made a good emperor? What were the diagnostic signs of good or bad imperial rule? Could they be seen in the everyday private behavior of the ruler?

Those features contributed to the popularity of Suetonius among leading

humanists in the Renaissance and more widely among the European elite. The great fourteenth-century scholar Petrarch (1304–1374) owned no fewer than three manuscript copies of the Latin text, including one that he heavily annotated; during the same period, Boccaccio made his own collection of excerpts from the *Lives*.[19] Two printed editions were produced in 1470, near the start of the first flood of classical publishing in Europe, and there were another thirteen by 1500. Translations into the vernacular went side by side. A French translation in manuscript had been produced anonymously in 1381, and by the time of the production of the tazze in the mid- to late sixteenth century, there were printed translations in at least German, Italian, and Spanish (English had to wait until 1606, for the influential translation of Philemon Holland). To put this another way, according to one rough reckoning, about 150,000 printed copies in Latin or the vernacular were produced in Europe between 1470 and 1700. That certainly does not make Suetonius's *Lives* the most popular classical history text of this period, but on those calculations it was roughly at the same level of wide dissemination as the works of historians Livy or Tacitus.[20]

Unsurprisingly, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* figured prominently in Renaissance debates about competing forms and methods in life writing. As a collection it lay behind the series of multiple biographies (of Illustrious Men, or Famous Characters from Ancient History, and so on) that were common at the time, and the structure of Suetonius's individual *Lives*—by topic and theme rather than strict chronology—was influential, too. Already in the fourteenth century, in the introduction to his own collection *On Illustrious Men*, Petrarch referred to some of the themes in his biographies, which appear to match those of Suetonius (including domestic life, bodily stature, manner of death). Elsewhere, in the second of his series of *Lives*, Petrarch based his detailed description of his own appearance closely on Suetonius's description of the emperor Augustus (63 B.C.–A.D. 14).[21]

By the mid-sixteenth century, controversies over the quality and value of Suetonian-style biography, and over its relationship with historiography more generally, had long been rehearsed. On the one hand, many writers and critics insisted on the educational and moral value of biographies. As Angelo Poliziano claimed in 1490 in his *Introduction to Suetonius*, biographers "have put in our midst the life, habits and deeds [of great men], onto which the whole of posterity might gaze as a role model," while also displaying the misdeeds of those whose example we should take care *not* to follow. On the other, there were those who criticized the triviality of some of Suetonius's subject matter and his larger-than-life, lurid portrayal of imperial vices. Even Petrarch is slightly apologetic about his adoption of Suetonian themes ("distracting digressions"), and in one nice image a famous biographer of the early sixteenth century, Paolo Giovio, defended his treatment of his subject's faults by comparing his own light touch with Suetonius's approach: "He didn't hold back from displaying their every vice as if he were inscribing them onto a triumphal arch."[22]

But Suetonius's Caesars left their mark on the visual arts even more than on the literary and scholarly tradition. Ancient Roman sculptors had often created groups of portraits, whether of leading members of an imperial dynasty or of famous philosophers. So far as is known, however, they never attempted to create the Suetonian set—each of the Roman rulers from Julius Caesar to Domitian—in marble, bronze, or any other material, even if writers did occasionally reflect on that group on paper.[23] From the fifteenth century onward, inspired by Suetonius's fame, even if not always by close acquaintance with his text itself, images of the Twelve Caesars became increasingly popular among European elites. Sometimes they were assembled from specimens of ancient sculpture identified or misidentified

as the emperors concerned; more often they were re-created in contemporary sculpture, in painting (from miniatures on manuscripts to display images on walls and ceilings), and on furniture and jewelry, in enamel and silverware, and, eventually, in any number of series of prints—which circulated to a far wider audience than the upper echelons of the aristocracy who could afford customized works or art. It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that in western Europe between the Middle Ages and the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, the Twelve Caesars, whether as a complete set or as individuals, were the commonest human subject of art after Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and a handful of saints.[24]

Many other factors underpinned the Renaissance enthusiasm for images of the Caesars, from the growing prestige of classical antiquity in general to the imagined continuum linking modern dynasts to their ancient predecessors (Holy Roman emperors confidently traced their descent back to pagan Roman emperors, and beyond them to Romulus himself). Particularly important were the increasing desire to put faces to Roman names and the intense scholarly activity devoted to working out how to recreate the "look" of the major figures of the Roman world. This is now often seen as one element in a greater commitment to archaeological accuracy in exploring the past. And certainly, careful scrutiny of heads on coins and other surviving ancient portraits, as well as (in the case of the Caesars) of the physical descriptions offered by Suetonius, was involved.[25] But the keen interest in the Caesars is also connected to a bigger conceptual change in how antiquity was envisaged and how the similarities and differences between the ancient and modern worlds were expressed. It is a change neatly summed up in the shift from fourteenth-century images of the Roman emperors, usually portrayed in the guise of fourteenth-century kings and nobles, to those in the sixteenth century, usually dressed in togas or in look-alike Roman armor and with apparently bona fide Roman weapons. The picture is, however, more nuanced than that. It is striking, for example, that on the tazze, while the emperor figures and the Romans in the engraved scenes are shown in ancient costume, many of their barbarian enemies and occasional onlookers are clad in unmistakably sixteenth-century dress (Tiberius II, p. 12). This is not an error: rather, two different ways of imagining the distant past were pointedly juxtaposed on a single object.

So, what did all the imperial imagery mean? The ubiquity of these Renaissance Caesars can make it easy to take them for granted, as if they often amounted to little more than cultural wallpaper or an off-the-peg badge of ancient and imperial prestige. Some of them, no doubt, were just that. But they could also be much more awkward and edgier. There are many more variants on the theme than the shorthand "Twelve Caesars" might suggest, and there was plenty of room for artistic flexibility, ingenuity, reinterpretation, and subversion. Even the number and lineup of emperors were not always constrained by the Suetonian template. Occasionally, for example, a couple of the most heinous imperial characters were omitted and two "good" emperors from later Roman dynasties inserted in their place. Many series stopped short of twelve or went beyond. Perhaps the most famous set of emperors made in the sixteenth century, the group painted by Titian for the Gonzaga of Mantua in the 1530s, comprised only eleven: Domitian, the last of Suetonius's twelve, was not included. Why not is uncertain. The common idea that Titian simply could not fit paintings of all twelve Caesars into the space available is desperately unconvincing. More likely, I suspect, the omission of the final character was a pointed comment on dynastic closure: here was a dynasty that literally did not end.[26]

Some artists also faced directly the villainy of so many of the rulers among Suetonius's twelve. Renaissance critics certainly suggested that these emperors could act as both

Ioan. Stradanus invent. Adrian. Collaert sculp.
12. DOMITIANVS.
Domitiane, tuæ labes turpißima gentis, Mox ruis in peius contemto numine Diuûm.
Æmula famoſo cur fingis sceptra Neroni? At quoniam insonteis nullâ ratione trucidas,
Principiò arriſit probitas, ſimulataq; virtus, Te meritò punire tui coguntur amici.

Fig. 3. Adriaen Collaert (Netherlandish, ca. 1560–1618) after a design by Jan van der Straet, known as Johannes Stradanus (Netherlandish, 1523–1605). *Domitianus*, plate 12 in *Roman Emperors on Horseback*. Published by Philips Galle, ca. 1587–89. Engraving, 12⅞ × 8¾ in. (32.6 × 22.1 cm). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, purchased with the support of the F. G. Waller-Fonds, 1963 (RP-P-1963-146). The oval detail on the statue's base shows the young Domitian skewering flies.

models to emulate and warnings of what to avoid. And some artists, patrons, and viewers must have seen the positive side in the image of power that the Twelve Caesars represented. But the fact was that, if you were following Suetonius closely, there was rather little to admire or to wish to emulate in them. In the captions to several sixteenth- and seventeenth-century series of prints, for example, Vespasian, the tenth emperor, was singled out as a Roman ruler unusually blessed with a natural death; the fact, or the hint, of foul play hung over the death of all his predecessors.[27] One series from about 1600, reproducing Titian's emperors (and our best evidence of them, since the originals were destroyed in a fire in the eighteenth century), attached a Latin poem to the image of each ruler. For the most part, the poems are decidedly unflattering, starting from insinuations of Julius Caesar's incest with his mother and finishing with the crimes of Domitian.[28] No less damning were the poems that accompanied the series of prints of the twelve emperors by Johannes Stradanus (Jan van der Straet), produced in the late 1580s. Stradanus's prints also incorporated into their design vignettes drawn from the *Lives* of Suetonius, including some of the darkest: Julius Caesar's assassination, for example; Augustus sacrilegiously playing the part of the god Apollo at a fancy-dress banquet; Domitian skewering flies (fig. 3).[29]

The question is: how do the Aldobrandini Tazze fit into this rich tradition?

Reading Suetonius on the Tazze

The iconography of the tazze in part overlaps comfortably with the standard forms in which emperors were depicted at this period and in part represents a much more distinctive program. The imperial figures that stand in the center of each dish, each figure named at his feet as one of the first twelve Roman rulers, are the most conventional elements of the design. Their facial features seem broadly based on what was becoming in the sixteenth century the orthodox physiognomy for their respective emperors. How close this is to what these men ever really looked like is highly debatable. Their appearance was derived ultimately from their tiny portraits on Roman coins, enlarged and elaborated by generations of artists, especially printmakers, who sometimes produced, or at least collaborated on, books that were in effect galleries of ancient Roman faces (mostly male, but including—often even more imaginatively—some of their female relatives). The features and costume of the silver Tiberius are typical in echoing his portraits in contemporary prints. Although in Stradanus's print Tiberius is seated on horseback, as are all the emperors in that series, the style of armor, with heavy epaulettes, elaborate boots, plated tunic, sword, and swaggering spear, is very similar in its antique idiom to the garb worn by the Tiberius of the tazze; and so, too, with the rest of the set (figs. 4, 5).

It is the design of the dishes that breaks striking new ground. The idea of illustrating Suetonius was not entirely unprecedented. There had been editions of the text before the mid-sixteenth century that included illustrations, but these images had usually been restricted to portraits of the emperors.[30] And Stradanus's prints incorporated miniature scenes from the *Lives* to animate the background and decorate the pedestals on which in some editions the equestrian emperors were presented. But the systematic illustration of each emperor's career and achievements, with four episodes chosen from Suetonius given such prominence in the overall design, was new.

We have already seen how carefully the *Lives* could be rendered in these images. Although there are one or two generic scenes (illustrations of particular imperial building schemes, taken more or less wholesale from printed sources[31]), most of the forty-eight images are based on the kind of detailed attention to the Suetonian text that underlay the scenes of Tiberius's triumph, Livia's dash through the burning countryside, and Caligula's encounter with the

Ioan. Stradanus inuent. Adrian. Collaert sculp. Phls Galle excud.
3.
TIBERIVS.
Claudius egregiè vixit priuatus, et insons Incolumi genitrice fuit, post, turpia vitæ
Imperijs, Auguste, tuis, simulataq; virtus Tempora, Tēleboûm Capreas vbi regna petiuit,
Sub Druso, morumq; diu ceu mixta Libido Ingenio, et totas vitijs laxauit habenas.

Fig. 4. Adriaen Collaert after Johannes Stradanus. *Tiberius*, plate 3 in *Roman Emperors on Horseback*. Published by Philips Galle, ca. 1587–89. Engraving, 13 × 8¾ in. (32.9 × 22.3 cm). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, purchased with the support of the F. G. Waller-Fonds, 1963 (RP-P-1963-137). The idiom of the emperor's ancient military garb resembles that of the Tiberius statuette seen in fig. 5.

mutinous soldiers. Only very occasionally did the designer or designers miss a trick or perhaps slip up.

The scene of the "triumph" of Nero is an especially interesting case. Suetonius devotes several lines to this event. It was not a celebration of any military victory but almost a parody of the traditional ceremony, held to congratulate the emperor for his successes in literary and athletic competitions in Greece. According to the *Life*, Nero rode

> in the very chariot that Augustus had once upon a time used to celebrate his triumphs, wearing purple robes, with a cloak decorated with golden stars, carrying the crown from the Olympic Games on his head, and from the Pythian Games in his right hand. A procession went in front of him, carrying placards detailing his other successes: where he had won, against whom, and what the subjects of the winning songs or plays were. Following the chariot came his cheerleaders according to the custom of such celebrations, and they called out that they were the emperor's men and the soldiers of his triumph. Then going through the arch in the Circus Maximus, which was torn down, and on through the Velabrum and the Forum, he made his way to the Palatine and the Temple of Apollo. Everywhere he went, animals were killed in sacrifice, lots of perfume was sprinkled onto the streets, and he was showered with birds, ribbons, and sweets.[32]

Some of these details are clearly registered on the dish (Nero IV, p. 19). Nero in his chariot wears one wreath (the Olympic crown) on his head and holds another (the Pythian) in his right hand. Onlookers are throwing down birds and other tidbits from balconies. Altars for sacrifice, with flames and animal victims nearby, are shown along the route. And the temple to which the

Fig. 5. Tiberius statuette on the Tiberius figure/ Nero dish tazza (pl. 6)

procession is making its way is clearly that of Apollo (the statue of the god on the temple steps holds Apollo's bow and arrow) rather than the standard Temple of Jupiter shown in the scenes of triumph on other dishes. But, despite Suetonius's headline claim that Nero had reused the vehicle of his predecessor, his chariot is not identical with the triumphal chariot shown on the Augustus dish (figs. 6, 7). And there is a posse of prisoners being marched through an arch in advance of the imperial party—a strange incongruity for a celebration of a victory that Suetonius insists involved no military combat. It may be that this was a conscious adjustment intended to bring the Neronian scene into line with the more standard triumphal processions that, as we shall see, are a prominent element in many of the dishes. Or, it may be that it was a less well-considered inclusion by those involved in the final execution of the design, who believed that, leaving aside the other details,

Fig. 6. Detail of Nero IV (p. 19) showing the emperor's triumphal chariot. Despite Suetonius's claim that Nero used the chariot of Augustus for the occasion, the designers have not here followed (or perhaps noticed the implications of) the Suetonian text.

this *was* a Neronian triumph, and that a triumph meant prisoners.

Whatever the correct explanation, it seems clear that whoever was behind the iconography of these dishes—whether some grand designer, an interventionist patron, hands-on craftsmen, a more remote source, or any combination of those—knew the text of Suetonius very well and was concerned to present it accurately in visual form. But they probably did not have either the will or the capacity to impose complete consistency from one tazza to the next, or to prevent flexibility and minor divergences in the final presentation of the chosen episodes.

It is also clear that there is a strong narrative reading of the text from scene to scene on each dish. The basic rule is that the episodes are arranged clockwise in the order in which they occur in the relevant *Life*, and, indeed, on most of the dishes explicit numbering of them, from 1 to 4, is still visible.[33] This alone should have indicated that there was a problem with the so-called Domitian dish in the V&A, for on the traditional identification of the scenes, they did not follow the order of Suetonius's *Life of Domitian*. There is only one exception to this arrangement: when a triumphal procession is shown, as it is on the majority of the dishes, it is usually made the final scene, even if that means taking it out of its Suetonian order. Such is the case with Nero's quasi triumph, and so, too, with Caligula's display across the bridge of boats, suggesting that the hints in Suetonius that this pageant also was intended as a kind of triumph had not been missed.[34] The only instances where the ceremony remains in its original narrative place—on the dishes of Tiberius and Titus—occur when the triumph in question was held before the emperor came to the throne, in the reign of his father. Taken together, all this signals not only careful attention to Suetonius's writing and a confidence in manipulating it, but also quite literally a triumphalist reading of these imperial *Lives*: in total, seven of these visual biographies actually end with a triumph or its equivalent.

Triumphalism in a more general sense is the hallmark of these images. The scenes from Suetonius chosen for illustration are often not those best remembered by modern readers of the *Lives of the Caesars*, but they are overwhelmingly positive. The tazze do not foreground the moral failings of the emperors or the tragedies of their careers, on which we, and some of our Renaissance predecessors, have laid such stress. There is no sign, as in Stradanus's prints, for example, of the bloody murder of Julius Caesar or of the sadism of the young Domitian. In fact, there are only two overtly negative scenes: Nero playing his lyre while Rome burns (Nero III, p. 19), and Caligula's antics on the bridge (and those are given triumphal resonance). There is only one imperial death, despite Suetonius's usual insistence on the last moments of his emperors and the violent ends that so many met, and that is the brave suicide of Otho, who reigned for three months in the civil wars of A.D. 69. The focus instead is on imperial victory (over the Germans and the Jews, for example), celebration and spectacle, liberality (both Caligula and Domitian are shown handing out money to the people in Rome), public building work, and, most of all, succession to the throne and the omens lying behind it. At least a quarter of the episodes depicted on the tazze focus on the transmission of imperial power and on the divine signs of future greatness.

It is this last aspect that makes the repertoire of Suetonian images offered here particularly unfamiliar to modern readers of the text. The moments when an eagle lands on the shoulder of Claudius as a portent of his rise to the throne (Claudius I, p. 16), or when a blast of lightning revealing twelve fasces beneath a lake predicts the rule of Galba (another short-term emperor, he reigned in A.D. 68–69), are not for us the famous highlights of the text. That is partly a consequence—and a failing—of our own modern reading practice. We now tend to think of Suetonius as writing twelve separate biographies, and we read them as such. No one worries, for example, about picking up the *Life of Nero* without having read the previous five *Lives* in the series; very few people, especially if they are reading in Latin, would start with the *Life of Julius Caesar* and read right through to *Domitian*. But, as earlier generations understood better than we do, what Suetonius wrote was much closer to a single book with twelve chapters, and as such it prompted questions not just about individual rulers but about the transmission of power over the long term and how succession was managed.[35] The tazze are by no means the only works of art in this period to pick out the omens of succession and predictions of future greatness for star treatment. Originally arranged on the wall beneath Titian's emperors in Mantua, painted panels by Giulio Romano depict scenes from each of the rulers' lives. One of the panels illustrates Julius Caesar launched on his bid to power by the sight of a statue of the young, precociously successful Alexander the Great; another shows a prediction of the future greatness of the infant Augustus; another, the eagle landing on Claudius's shoulder (fig. 8).[36]

The cycle of images on the tazze is even in this respect unusually optimistic. Of course, darker readings might always have been possible. We cannot know, for example, how many viewers looked at the final episode on Galba's dish (Galba IV, p. 21), where the elderly, childless emperor adopts a successor, and shook their heads in the knowledge of the futility of the gesture: within a couple of weeks, both adopter and adopted would be killed.[37] But in general, the overwhelming impression given by the scenes is one of successful transmission of imperial status, of inheritance of power validated by signs from the gods (even when really granted in civil war), and of emperors who died in their beds. This is true right up to the end, where the final scene on Domitian's dish is not his assassination in a palace coup in A.D. 96—a tiny version of which is visible in the background of Stradanus's print (see fig. 3, palace portico at far right)—but his triumphal procession.

Fig. 7. Detail of Augustus IV (p. 11) showing the emperor in his triumphal chariot

Altogether, they would make a reassuring sight for sixteenth-century aristocrats and dynasts who chose to scrutinize them, offering a vision of lordly success, liberality, military victory, spectacular showmanship—and dynastic continuity.

The Fate of Suetonius and His Caesars

So why on earth did the Aldobrandini Tazze suffer the fate that they have? There is a strong iconographic program, including the figures of named emperors, rooted in a well-known Latin text. How was it that emperors migrated from one dish to another, ending up tied to what were flagrantly the wrong scenes—as any consultation of Suetonius would have quickly revealed?

Fig. 8. Workshop of Giulio Romano (Italian, 1499–1546). *The Omen of Claudius's Imperial Powers*, ca. 1536–39. Oil on wood, 47¾ × 36⅞ in. (121.4 × 93.5 cm). Hampton Court Palace, Richmond upon Thames (RCIN 402806)

This may be one of those rare cases where the domestic staff bears some of the responsibility. As I discovered first at the V&A, the imperial figures unscrew very easily and can be easily transposed. They must always have been disassembled when moved any distance or cleaned thoroughly. Unless the dismantling was done very systematically, either a text of Suetonius or an intimate knowledge of it would have been needed to put them back together correctly. It is hard to imagine that those on whose tables or in whose display cases the tazze stood would have checked very often that the match of emperor to dish was correct. If they did not, then the tazze could well have begun to be muddled in this way very early in their history. The earliest precisely dated documentary evidence we have for the combinations of these pieces admittedly goes back no further than the late nineteenth century, but certainly the confusion had set in by that point. A description in 1872 shows that the figure of Augustus was already screwed into the Domitian dish; a decade later, the tazza with what was clearly the figure of Nero screwed into the Titus dish was sold in Germany; and, according to the information we have on them, three of the six tazze owned by Frédéric Spitzer were mismatched when they were sold in 1893.[38] In fact, the undersides of some of the dishes bear the traces of earlier attempts, successful and unsuccessful, to identify the protagonist of the scenes. Eight of them have names scratched onto them, undated but compatible with a nineteenth-century hand, though possibly earlier. Some are correct, but the Domitian dish is marked with the name *Vespasian*, the Caligula dish with *Domitian*, and the Vespasian dish with *Caligula*.[39]

The fate of Suetonius's reputation after the sixteenth century may also have a part to play in the later history of confusion and misidentification. *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* has continued to be an important text for those studying Roman history or concerned with the different versions of life writing and their ancestry. But from at least the early nineteenth century, in the pedagogical tradition in Britain and more widely in Europe, Suetonius as an author was somewhat marginalized. He was not generally used as a model for what had by then become the backbone of the school Latin curriculum—that is, translating from the modern vernacular into Latin in imitation of the "best" Latin authors. Suetonius was not counted among the best; writing at the beginning of the second century A.D., he was too late for what was then judged the greatest age of Latin prose. His style was thought to be no match for the linguistic and rhetorical mastery of Cicero (106–43 B.C.). Among the European elite, Suetonius slipped down slightly further, into the second rank.[40]

That decline may well be, even if indirectly, one of the factors that explains a surprising silence in the majority of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century sale catalogues that feature one or more of the

tazze. Although in a couple of cases the name of Suetonius is mentioned (if only as a tentative source: "presumably De vita Caesarum by Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus"[41]), mostly the scenes are described as merely drawn from the history of the emperor concerned. Even when they are more or less correctly identified, as at the sale of the Titus dish in 1914, they are not necessarily linked to the relevant *Life* ("the scenes depicted in the four panels illustrate the history of Titus immediately succeeding his capture of Jerusalem in A.D. 70"[42]).

The connection with Suetonius has regularly been stressed in the recent scholarly literature (though, even there, not entirely accurately), and there is a clear awareness of the Suetonian source lying behind some of the descriptions in early sale catalogues and reports—indicated, for example, by references to "The Twelve Caesars" (the capital letters pointing to Suetonius's title).[43] But the regular absence of Suetonius's name and the entire omission of any reference to the Latin source from some catalogues suggest that among the wider interest group of collectors, auction houses, buyers, and sellers, the specifically Suetonian background to the scenes was being replaced by a much more general and vaguer sense of imperial history and life story. Once the Suetonian connection had faded, the reliable explanation of the scenes was obscured and the likelihood of confusion enormously increased. People simply did not know which dish went with which figure.

The Missing Book

The irony is that, at least until the late nineteenth century, a manuscript "key" to the scenes on the dishes had been available. There are several reports of a "curious volume . . . giving a very interesting historical account of the salvers and the achievements displayed thereon. It is bound in a rich green velvet and ornamented with 24 ancient gold coins, clasps, and centre medallions."[44] Dating to the sixteenth or seventeenth century (accounts differ) and compiled, we assume, by a scholar or scholar-owner well aware of the dangers of confusion, it was put on sale in Paris in 1893 alongside six of the tazze and went with the Domitian (that is, the Tiberius!) dish to the dealers J. & S. Goldschmidt, who bought all but one of the tazze (Julius Caesar) that were then on the market. According to the sale catalogue, the volume contained "the explanation of all the subjects" found on the dishes.[45] But it has not been seen again. Or at least wherever it might be lurking—if it indeed still lurks—it has not been recognized.

It is always easy for scholars to imagine that lost objects hold the answers to their problems. Certainly, those of us who work on the Aldobrandini Tazze can regularly be heard muttering, "If only we had that green velvet book!" Whether it really would deliver what we hoped about the history of the pieces, their commissioning, production, and all the other puzzles discussed in the following pages, I have my doubts. But it is worth reflecting that, if all the claims for the green velvet book are true, throughout the period up to 1893, when the wrong emperors were getting screwed into the wrong dishes, the answers were at hand for anyone who chose to look for them. But they either did not look or did not act on what they read.

But, book or no book, as I think back to my own first encounter with the so-called Domitian dish in the V&A, I can't help feeling that we owe it to the designers and craftsmen behind these marvelous objects, to those who commissioned them, to Suetonius himself, and even to the emperors—brutal rulers though they might have been in real life—to get these scenes sorted out, connect the right man with the right deeds, and see them all together as originally intended. And I think at last we have done just that.

Julia Siemon

Renaissance Intellectual Culture, Antiquarianism, and Visual Sources

On the Aldobrandini Tazze, imperial Rome is an idea, not a time or place. In the Suetonian scenes, Renaissance buildings and people mix seamlessly with historical figures and artifacts within supposedly ancient space. The settings generally do not *look* like Rome, ancient or modern: there is no evidence of the artists' firsthand experience of the physical city, nor even of Italy.[1] Instead, the concept of Rome is conjured through the precise deployment of learned visual references gathered from portable antiquarian sources such as coins, books, and prints.[2] In the interstices between these erudite citations, the artists turned to what they knew, crafting whimsical passages that betray an unmistakably Northern European, sixteenth-century sensibility. The result is a marvelous fantasia at once scholarly and irreverent—a pastiche of ancient material repurposed to bring meaning to a chaotic Renaissance world.

Examination of the specific visual sources upon which the narrative scenes depend provides a new dating for the tazze and offers insight into the artistic and intellectual context of their origin. Excellent new photography carried out by the Metropolitan Museum reveals that a number of goldsmiths were involved in the creation of the tazze, which vary greatly in their respective styles of chasing and slightly in the dimensions of their framing elements, such as the columns that divide the scenes. This team of goldsmiths must have been guided in its work by an erudite scholar equipped with a sophisticated knowledge of the Suetonian text as well as with a substantial collection of antiquarian material that could be utilized to lend authority and emphasis to evocations of the Roman past.

On the tazze, this antiquarian source material is almost always deftly integrated into highly original compositions. The result is a vibrant tension central to the scenes' appeal. Embedded within each image is an interplay between the thoughtful, deliberate historicism of a serious antiquarian scholar and the fertile imaginations of a group of artists for whom the ancient world provides an opportunity for unregulated expression—the lawless realm of fairy tale. The best narrative scenes are thus equally significant and enchanting. Neither capricious nor pedantic, they balance the weighty import of classical learning with a joyful artistic autonomy. By attempting to isolate these two creative impulses—by disentangling scholar and goldsmith—we can begin to appreciate the subtlety of their interactions.

The (Limited) Influence of Pirro Ligorio

We start by addressing the two most obvious and heavy-handed instances of borrowing that appear on the Aldobrandini Tazze—outliers among the more nuanced appropriations seen in the rest of the set. In each of these two scenes, a famous print is reproduced in full: once, for the third episode on the Claudius dish, and again for Domitian II. In both cases, the print sources are engravings made after designs by the Italian antiquarian Pirro Ligorio (ca. 1513–1583) and published in the early 1550s by Michele Tramezzino in Rome.[3]

Claudius III relates to a passage in chapter 20 of Suetonius's *Life of Claudius*, which

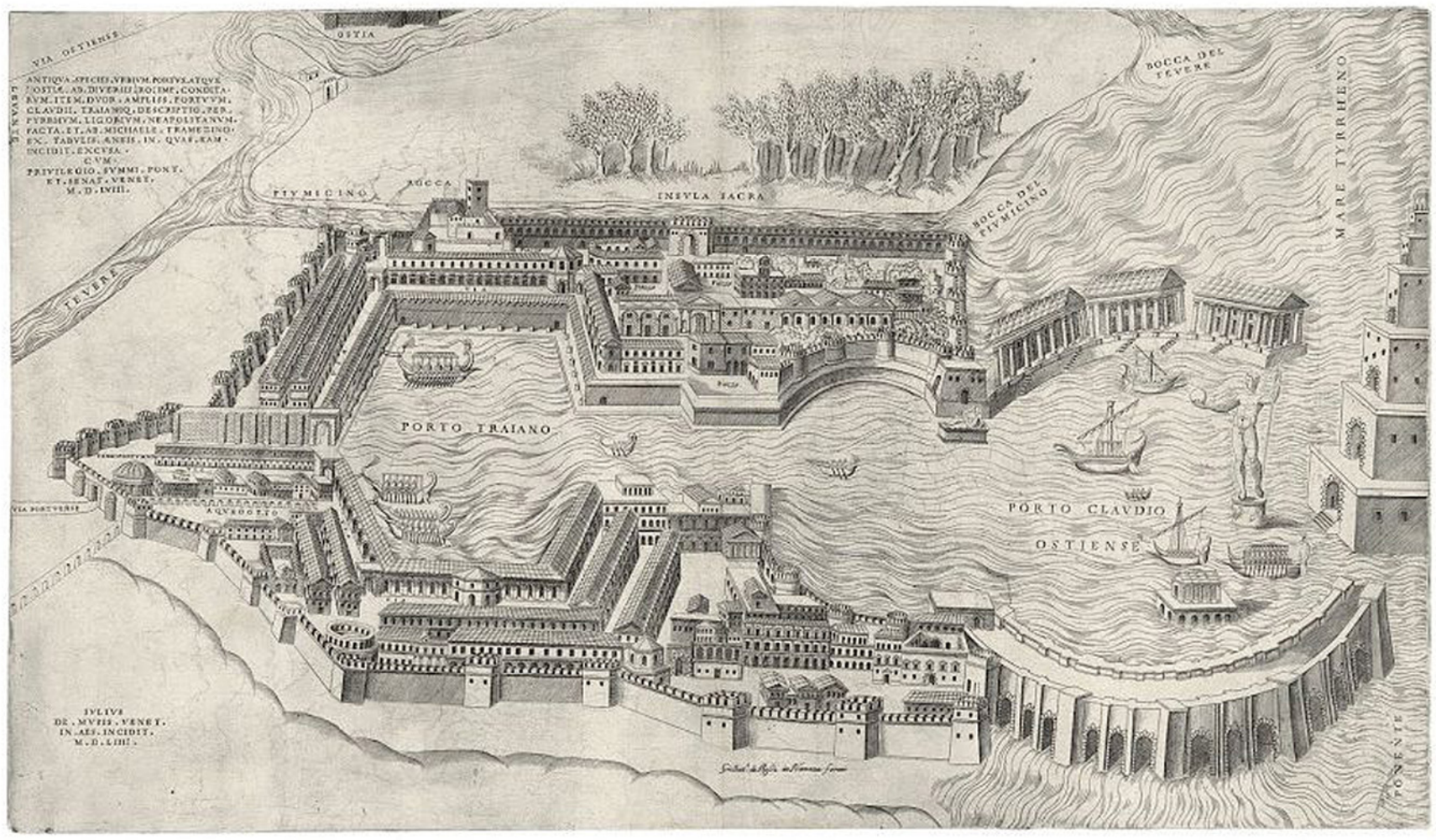


Fig. 1. Giulio de' Musi (Italian, active 1550–55) after Pirro Ligorio (Italian, ca. 1513–1583). *Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae: Birds-Eye View of the Port of Rome*. Published by Michele Tramezzino, 1554. Engraving, sheet 15 9/16 × 26 15/16 in. (39.5 × 68.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, transferred from the Library, 1941 (41.72[2.2])

celebrates certain of the emperor's public works (see p. 17).[4] Among these is the great Port of Ostia, the harbor of Rome. Rather than invent the harbor anew, the goldsmith has reproduced in its entirety Ligorio's *Bird's-Eye View of the Port of Rome*, engraved by Giulio de' Musi in 1554 (fig. 1). The print is one of several based on Ligorio's reconstructions of Roman architectural sites issued separately by Tramezzino in the years 1552–58.[5] Included in this group is Nicolas Béatrizet's engraving *The Circus Maximus* (1553), reproduced on the Domitian dish (fig. 2, and see Domitian II, p. 30).[6] The image corresponds to a passage in chapter 4 of Domitian's *Life*, in which Suetonius refers briefly to the building and activities held within it.[7]

In the second half of the sixteenth century, Ligorio's antiquarian studies—the result of a synthesis of multiple ancient sources, including visual materials such as coins, sculpture, and architectural ruins, as well as classical texts—constituted an essential resource for scholars of ancient Rome.[8] Born in Naples and trained as a painter and architect, Ligorio arrived in Rome about 1537 and quickly became interested in the city's ancient history.[9] In 1549, he entered the service of Ippolito II d'Este (1509–1572) as the Ferrarese cardinal's personal archaeologist.[10] During the next two decades in Rome, Ligorio excavated ruins, served as architect to several popes, and produced maps, reconstructions, and encyclopedic volumes.[11] In 1568 he accepted a position in Ferrara as court antiquarian under Alfonso II d'Este, taking responsibility for the ducal collection of classical material.[12] When Ligorio died in 1583, only a small fraction of his work had been published, but it constituted an essential component of the late Renaissance conception of ancient Rome.[13]

On the Aldobrandini Tazze, the two narrative scenes based on Ligorio's designs are visually quite distinct from the other compositions, although they are in keeping with

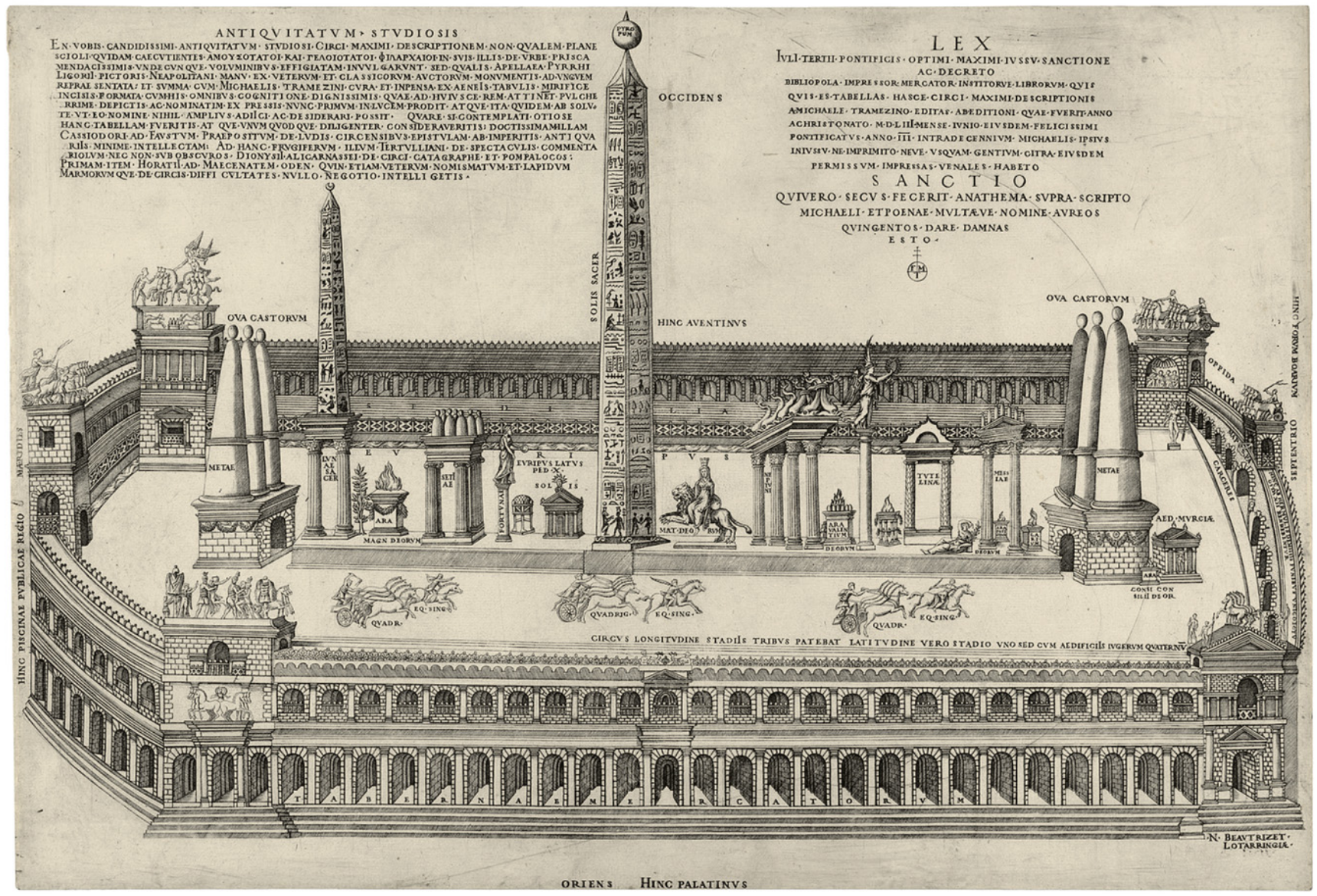

ANTIQVITATVM STVDIOSIS
EN VOBIS CANDIDISSIMI ANTIQVITATVM STVDIOSI CIRCI MAXIMI DESCRIPTIONEM NON QVALEM PLANE SCIOLI QVIDAM CAECVTIENTES AMOYΣOTATOI KAI ΠΕΛΟΙΟΤΑΤΟΙ ΦΙΛΑΡΧΑΙΟΙ IN SVIS ILLIS DE VRBE PRISCA MENDACISSIMIS VNDE CVNQVE VOLVMINIBVS EFFIGIATAM INVVLGARVNT SED QVALIS APELLAEA PYRRHI LIGORII PICTORIS NEAPOLITANI MANV EX VETERVM ET CLASSICORVM AVCTORVM MONVMENTIS ADAVGVM REPRAESENTATA ET SVMMA CVM MICHAELIS TRAMEZINI CVRA ET IMPENSA EX AENEIS TABVLIS MIRIFICE INCISIS FORMATA CVMHIS OMNIBVS COGNITIONE DIGNISSIMIS QVAE AD HVIVSCE REM ATTINET PVLCHERRIME DEPICTIS ACNOMINATIM EX PRESSIS NVNC PRIMVM IN LVCEM PRODIT ATQVE ITA QVIDEM AB SOLVTE VT EO NOMINE NIHIL AMPLIVS ADIICI AC DESIDERARI POSSIT QVARE SI CONTEMPLATI OTIOSE HANC TABELLAM FVERITIS AT QVE VNVM QVOD QVE DILIGENTER CONSIDERAVERITIS DOCTISSIMAM ILLAM CASSIODORI AD FAVSTVM PRAEPOSITVM DE LVDIS CIRCENSIBVS EPISTVLAM AB IMPERITIS ANTIQVARIIS MINIME INTELLECTAM AD HANC FRVGIFERVM ILIVM TERTVLLIANI DE SPECTACVLIS COMMENTARIOLVM NEC NON SVB OBSCVROS DIONYSII ALICARNASSEI DE CIRCI CATAGRAPHE ET POMPALOCOS PRIMAM ITEM HORATII AD MAECENATEM ODEN QVIN ETIAM VETERVM NOMISMATVM ET LAPIDVM MARMORVM QVE DE CIRCIS DIFFICVLTATES NVLLO NEGOTIO INTELLIGETIS
LEX
IVLI TERTII PONTIFICIS OPTIMI MAXIMI IVSSV SANCTIONE AC DECRETO
BIBLIOPOLAE IMPRESSORIS MERCATORIS INSTITORVE LIBRORVM QVIS QVIS ES TABELLAS HASCE CIRCI MAXIMI DESCRIPTIONIS A MICHAELE TRAMEZINO EDITAS AB EDITIONI QVAE FVERIT ANNO A CHRISTO NATO MDLIII MENSE IVNIO EIVSDEM FELICISSIMI PONTIFICATVS ANNO III INTRA DECENNIVM MICHAELIS IPSIVS IVSSV NE IMPRIMITO NEVE VSQVAM GENTIVM CITRA EIVSDEM PERMISSVM IMPRESSAS VENALES HABETO
SANCTIO
QVI VERO SECVS FECERIT ANATHEMA SVPRASCRIPTO MICHAELI ET POENAE MVLTAEVE NOMINE AVREOS QVINGENTOS DARE DAMNAS ESTO
OCCIDENS
SOLIS SACER
HINC AVENTINVS
OVA CASTORVM
OVA CASTORVM
METAE
METAE
OPPIDA
AED MVRCIAE
HINC PISCINAE PVBLICAE REGIO
HINC PORTA CAPENA SEPTENTRIO
CIRCVS LONGITVDINE STADIIS TRIBVS PATEBAT LATITVDINE VERO STADIO VNO SED CVM AEDIFICIIS IVGERVM QVATERNVM
ORIENS
HINC PALATINVS
N. BEATRIZET LOTARINGVS

Fig. 2. Nicolas Béatrizet (French, 1515–ca. 1566) after Pirro Ligorio. *Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae: The Circus Maximus*. Published by Michele Tramezzino, 1553. Engraving, first state of three, 14 15/16 × 21 7/8 in. (38 × 55.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, transferred from the Library, 1941 (41.72[1.67])

the set's overall theme. The tazze present the Twelve Caesars in an almost universally positive light; the Circus Maximus and Port of Ostia, as public achievements of the emperors Domitian and Claudius, make fitting subjects for representation on those rulers' respective dishes. Unique, however, is the lack of narrative content in Domitian II and Claudius III: all the other scenes take a specific event as their subject, not an ancient monument.[14] Barring these two exceptions, the narrative scenes on the tazze function not as literal depictions (or reconstructions) of ancient Rome, but rather as vehicles for telling certain carefully chosen stories about the rulers concerned.

That the other forty-six narrative scenes prioritize storytelling over apparent naturalism or historical accuracy is reflected in the originality of their compositions. They display extensive temporal license, frequently depicting actions together with their causes and subsequent effects. Sometimes the conjoining of events requires compressing into a single image several sequential occurrences taking place in different locations. This telescoping effect is often found in representations of military campaigns, such as Julius Caesar I (invasion of Britain), Augustus II (invasion of Egypt), and Vespasian I (invasion of Judaea) (see pp. 8, 10, 26). Augustus II is dominated by the Battle of Actium but also includes the Temple of Apollo at Nicopolis (expanded by Augustus in celebration of his victory) and the death of the defeated Cleopatra in Alexandria.[15] Elsewhere, as a tale unfolds, emperors and other historical figures may appear more than once in a single composition, as occurs in Galba I and Vespasian II (both episodes concerned with good omens) (see pp. 20, 26). This anti-illusionistic and visually disjointed approach is at odds with the wholesale borrowing that defines Domitian II and

Claudius III, the only scenes on the Aldobrandini Tazze in which entire prints are reproduced largely intact.

Yet while the debt to Ligorio's compositions is unmistakable in these two scenes, it is far from absolute. The artists have altered the perspective and scale and added elements not found in the original prints. The landscape surrounding the harbor on Claudius III, for example, has been expanded to include rippling waves, grassy tufts of earth, and three grazing stags; Domitian II is more literal in its adherence to the Ligorio but still is supplemented with billowing clouds on the horizon. The most jarring change occurs in the presentation of architecture. In his designs, Ligorio purposefully disregarded contemporary conventions of perspectival construction in favor of a flatter representation meant to evoke the aesthetic of ancient coins and sculptural reliefs. As Howard Burns has explained, Ligorio "draws the city and the buildings as if he were himself an ancient Roman artist."[16]

The authors of the tazze demonstrate even less interest than Ligorio in the aims of Renaissance pictorial illusionism but make no pretense of employing a consistent alternative formula. Little heed is given to hierarchies of scale, logical proportions, and unified perspective. Ian Campbell, in a lecture on the architectural representation on the dishes, concluded that the goldsmiths "show no detailed knowledge of ancient Roman architecture, nor any desire to get it precisely right."[17] While Domitian II and Claudius III stand out for their relatively close adherence to their print sources, the goldsmiths have nevertheless reproduced Ligorio's harbor and amphitheater from multiple conflicting viewpoints and distorted the buildings to fit within the awkward dimensions of the allotted space. In many other scenes, alterations to the visual source material are so extreme that the specific precedents are unlikely ever to be identified definitively.

Despite their status as outliers, Domitian II and Claudius III offer useful starting points from which we can begin to uncover the design process of the narrative scenes. First, these two images establish that the artists had access to popular, mid-sixteenth-century antiquarian prints and turned to them for inspiration. This knowledge encourages us to hunt for other instances of similar borrowings. Moreover, the evidence offered by Domitian II and Claudius III suggests that each scene on the tazze relates precisely to a specific passage from Suetonius. These factors imply the involvement of a scholar with profound knowledge of both the Suetonian text and the available antiquarian imagery, someone we might term the designer—or even "scholar-designer"—of the project. But Domitian II and Claudius III also hint at a separate creative force, that is, the goldsmiths themselves, artists almost entirely indifferent to the simulation of the antique.

It is unclear why the two Ligorio prints were copied so faithfully on the tazze. Serendipity may have played a part. Possibly, the designer responsible for selecting the visual source material simply had these engravings at hand and recognized their utility. They were certainly widely available: beginning in 1573, Ligorio's designs for the Port of Ostia and Circus Maximus joined hundreds of other assorted works in forming the publisher Antonio Lafréry's *Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae*, a print series illustrating the marvels of ancient Rome.[18] The works were designed especially for popular collecting and could be purchased singly or gathered into large albums.[19] Or perhaps Ligorio's reputation somehow played a role in the choice to employ his imagery so openly. His reconstruction of the Circus Maximus, at least, was authoritative. Antonio Agostín, in his study of ancient coins (first published in Spain in 1587), wrote that he had not seen medals bearing representations of the structure, but only the designs by his friend Ligorio, "the great antiquarian and painter."[20] There is, however, no further evidence to suggest that Ligorio's scholarship was

AVGVSTO · OPTIMO · FORTISSIMO · QVE · PRINCIPI · OPVS · DICATVM
IOVI · OPTIMO · MAXIMO · SACRVM
Senatores
Magistratus
Lictores
Ministri turbam baculis submouentes
Hostiae, popae, Victimarij
Camilli et flamenij
Elephanti gentium
Tibicines, Citharoedi phonasci
Imperator, triumphans
Lictores
Tempium Iouis Capitolini
Camilli et flamenij
Comparitum populo Romano Datum
Dictatum
Currus armis Diademata coronae
regum, aut ducum captorum
Reges captiui cum familia
Vrbes, ac Gentes Bello captae
C · Duilios, M · F · M · N · Consul
CN · POMPEIO · CN · F
MAGNO · IMP
AXIMOSQVE · MCISTRATOS · Libertatemque reuisam
M · SOVEM · CASTRIS · EXFOCIONT · MACEL em, Idem
EM · NAVEBOS · MARID · CONSOL · PRIMOS · Creuit
CLASESQVE · NAVALES · PRIMOS · ORNAVET · PAL ma
CVMQVE · EIS · NAVEBVS · CLASEIS · POENICAS · OM nes
CARTACINIENSI · N · NVOS · L
CAPT

A promising scholar, he was sent by benefactors to study first in Naples and then in Rome, where he arrived in 1549.[22] In the early 1550s he worked as a historian for his monastic order, investigating both the ecclesiastical and Roman past, subjects that would occupy him for the rest of his career.[23] At mid-decade he came under the primary patronage of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, with whom he left Rome in 1556, traveling to Parma and then Venice.[24] They visited Augsburg in 1559, where Panvinio established connections with members of the prominent Fugger family and met the Holy Roman emperor, Ferdinand I.[25] The cardinal brought Panvinio back with him to Rome in 1560; eight years later, not yet forty, Panvinio died of fever during a trip to Sicily.[26]

At the time of his death, Panvinio had published over three thousand pages related to his studies.[27] During the 1550s and 1560s, his writings were printed in Rome, Venice, Basel, and Cologne; in the decades following his death, these works were frequently reissued, as were new, posthumous publications constructed from his surviving manuscripts.[28] In 1571, Michele Tramezzino printed a brief, illustrated description of Roman triumphal processions, a hybrid treatise crafted out of repurposed material from Panvinio's works. It was released in Venice, in Latin and Italian editions, as *De triumpho commentarius / Comentario dell'uso et ordine de' trionfi antichi*. Although neither the text nor the images were new, in Tramezzino's publication they were united for the first time. The book was widely available throughout Europe.

The text of *De triumpho* consists of a short excerpt—only eleven pages in the Latin version—originally published in 1558 as an appendix to Panvinio's *Fastorum libri V a Romulo rege usque ad Imp. Caesarem Carolum V Austrium . . .*, a history of Roman triumphal processions stretching from the time of Romulus to the reign of the Habsburg

emperor Charles V.[29] In *De triumpho*, this brief text is accompanied for the first time by five illustrated sheets, the first depicting the Rostral Column of Duilius (a victory column erected by Augustus). Sprawling across the other four joined, foldout sheets is a continuous, densely detailed illustration of a triumphal procession, titled *Ornatissimi triumphi . . .* (fig. 3).[30] (The date 1565 appears on the image, which may have been published separately, in limited distribution at that time.)[31] The caption identifies the *Ornatissimi triumphi* as a representation of the type of celebration that would traditionally follow a Roman military victory.[32] Running across the top of the procession, just beneath the row of buildings, is a prominent dedication to Emperor Maximilian II, who had succeeded Ferdinand I in 1564.[33]

The triumph begins at far left, outside the city wall. There, just beyond a gate labeled *Porta Triumphalis*, the emperor addresses his troops and a sacrifice is made. Within the city walls, the long parade loops three times horizontally across the pages, framed at left and right by triumphal arches. Captions identify the participants, among them dignified magistrates and senators, captives with hands bound behind their backs, lictors (ceremonial bodyguards) holding axes, trumpeters playing their instruments, and cult members burning incense. Carts carry heavy loads of treasure, sacrificial bulls are led to slaughter, and boys holding sprays of laurel ride on the backs of elephants. The upper edge of the *Ornatissimi triumphi* is lined with buildings (some identified, such as the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus) and spectators, who gather along the street and fill windows. At the base of the image, in the center of the procession, the emperor appears again, this time as *Imperator triumphans* standing in a quadriga—a lavishly decorated chariot pulled by four horses (fig. 4). Just over his shoulder stands a small Winged Victory; balancing on one foot on the rear edge of his chariot, she reaches out to crown him with laurel.

Panvinio, unlike Ligorio, was not trained as an artist; this ambitious illustration was most likely produced under his direction by the French engraver Etienne Dupérac.[34] Dupérac, an artist and architect with antiquarian interests of his own, arrived in Rome in 1559 and afterward worked in the circle of Ligorio and Panvinio.[35] On the caption to the *Ornatissimi triumphi*, Panvinio nonetheless takes full credit for the illustration, declaring it be his own, based on the "ancient testimony of stones, coins and books."[36] The omission of Dupérac's name seems consistent with Panvinio's general attitude toward the work of others: William Stenhouse has attributed the historian's astonishing prolificacy to his skill as "a great compiler."[37] Panvinio's oeuvre not only reflects knowledge of classical texts and antiquities but also makes abundant if unacknowledged use of the efforts of his fellow antiquarian contemporaries and forebears. Ligorio, who shared a publisher with Panvinio, went so far as to accuse Panvinio of stealing his work.[38] In the case of *De triumpho*, Stenhouse demonstrates that although Panvinio's antiquarian scholarship sets the publication apart, the *Ornatissimi triumphi* has its origins in a long tradition of Renaissance treatments of the Roman triumph.[39] The Aldobrandini Tazze, through a reliance on Panvinio, inherit strong ties to this Renaissance tradition.

The triumphs on the tazze are brimming with features that closely resemble those in the *Ornatissimi triumphi*: the emperors in their quadrigae, the trumpeters, captives, senators, lictors, sacrificial bulls, and even the elephants appear.[40] Still, precisely because Panvinio was such a great compiler of ancient and Renaissance imagery, the artists of the tazze might in theory have been familiar with these features of the Roman triumph through different means. Further investigation, however, proves beyond a doubt that the creators of the tazze did indeed know Panvinio's illustration and that they turned to it for inspiration.

The eight triumphs on the tazze function as variations on a theme. Each is tailored to the specific Caesar and festivities described

Fig. 4. Detail of fig. 3 showing the emperor in his quadriga

Fig. 5. Detail of Julius Caesar IV (p. 9)

by Suetonius, but the images adhere to a shared formula: the victorious ruler parades from left to right across the center of the composition, with spectators lining the bottom of the image and buildings running parallel across the top.[41] Many elements related to Panvinio's *Ornatissimi triumphi*—such as the bejeweled bulls and their attendants, and the elephants with their young riders—repeat on several dishes. These motifs are never exact duplicates; the artists alter the imagery, ensuring that each triumph retains its individuality. The bound captives, for example, assume the same pose on each dish, slanting their well-muscled shoulders, but their clothing changes from one tazza to the other. Likewise, the detail of the Caesar in his quadriga sometimes appears very close to the Panvinio (especially in Julius Caesar IV) but is altered in others (Titus III and Domitian IV), as the artists rethink the chariot's decoration or shift the emperor's gesture (fig. 5 and pp. 29, 31). There is no evidence here of the reverence paid to Ligorio's two prints in Domitian II and Claudius III. Instead, Panvinio's imagery is used, manipulated, and confidently reinterpreted: the apparent aim is to create original compositions that convey clearly the symbolic meaning of the narrative scenes, not to preserve the specific source material intact. The visual source material is only as valuable as its ability to communicate specific iconographic information. Nowhere is this approach more apparent than in a pair of scenes on the Caligula and Domitian dishes—representations of imperial generosity derived from the *Ornatissimi triumphi*.

The Design Process

In the upper right corner of the *Ornatissimi triumphi*, a small vignette stands independently from the triumphal procession nearby (fig. 6). A label identifies it as a representation of *Congiarium populo Romano Datum*, or imperial generosity shown to the Roman people. The area is divided into two levels; above, on a raised platform, a togate emperor with one arm outstretched sits upon a curule chair, a tall tripod beside him. He is surrounded by a cluster of six standing figures, two of them allegorical: at right, Liberalitas, the personification of generosity, is identified by her cornucopia and abacus (for counting coins); behind and to the left, helmeted Minerva holds a small figure of Winged Victory. Beneath this group, unidentified members of the *populo Romano* engage with one another or stretch out their hands toward the emperor in expectation of his munificence.

This passage is based on a stone relief showing the Liberalitas of Marcus Aurelius, originally part of an arch or monument to Marcus Aurelius but later affixed to the Arch of Constantine in Rome (A.D. 315) (fig. 7).[42] Panvinio has retained the general format of the relief—the seated emperor elevated on a platform above his

Fig. 6. Detail of fig. 3 showing the emperor bestowing *congiarium* (imperial generosity)

people—but has expanded the composition, adding Minerva, Liberalitas, and the tripod. Where the relief is damaged, Panvinio has restored and extrapolated, filling out, for example, the figure of a young boy perched on his father's shoulders.

In chapter 4 of Domitian's *Life*, Suetonius writes that "on three occasions [Domitian] gave a handout to the people of three hundred sesterces each. . . ."[43] In Domitian III, the emperor undertakes this act of largess in a composition based on Panvinio's version of the Marcus Aurelius relief, not on the relief itself. On the dish, the emperor is shown sitting on a raised platform set within a cityscape of ambiguous depth and organization (fig. 8). Throngs of people await their gifts, while a line of satisfied recipients retreats in the background at right, clutching heavy purses. The fundamental elements of the *Liberalitas of Marcus Aurelius* are present in the scene, but only as transmitted by Panvinio. Below the platform, among the

Fig. 7. *Liberalitas of Marcus Aurelius*. Marble relief on the Arch of Constantine, Rome, A.D. 315

Fig. 8. Detail of Domitian III (p. 31) showing the emperor bestowing *congiarium*. The design is based in part on the image seen in fig. 6.

of the city by Adam Reißner (ca. 1486–1582), first published (in German and Latin) in Frankfurt in 1563 (fig. 12).[52] In Titus I, the designer has added an important element that does not appear in the woodcut original: a bird with spread wings atop a gate called Solomon's Porch (fig. 13). Identified on Reißner's map as the Portico of Solomon, this was the eastern entrance to the enclosure surrounding Herod's reconstruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. In Reißner's description of the city—hundreds of pages into the book, nowhere near the illustration—the author explains that King Herod set a large golden eagle in precisely that spot as a symbol of his allegiance to Roman rule.[53]

Regardless of whether the scholarly designer of Titus I knew Herod's eagle from Reißner's treatise or from another history, such as Josephus's *Jewish War*, his decision to append this element to his loose interpretation of Reißner's Jerusalem for the dish is revealing.[54] It alerts us to the designer's critical role in the creation of the Aldobrandini Tazze, editing the visual sources to reflect his abundant learning. Relevant material was not merely gathered; it was revised and enhanced. The difficulty in establishing firm precedents for much of the ancient material on the tazze is explained in part by the fact that neither designer nor artists seem especially beholden to their sources. The designer alters the source material with a clear purpose: the imagery is deliberately manipulated in order to best communicate the intended symbolic meaning of the scene. The goldsmiths, on the other hand, appear to amend for aesthetic reasons alone: they absorb and digest the visual precedents, retaining the necessary iconographic content but otherwise subsuming the source material within compositions that otherwise mostly reflect their own idiosyncratic sensibilities.

Returning to the example of Domitian III, it should come as no surprise that the designer has approached the Panvinio print with such authority and confidence, freely

Fig. 12. Woodcut illustration showing overhead view of Jerusalem similar to that seen in Titus I (p. 28). From Reißner 1563, pp. 24–25

Fig. 13. Detail of Titus I (p. 28) showing an eagle perched on a gate called Solomon's Porch

changing, combining, and manipulating the antiquarian imagery in order to express the intended meaning of the ancient moment to best advantage. His methods are further illuminated by comparing Domitian III with Caligula III (pp. 31, 15) a scene with which it has much in common. Like the triumph scenes, these two compositions are variations on a theme: in this case, the theme of the emperor's magnanimity. For Caligula, the corresponding Suetonian lines appear in chapter 17 of his *Life*, where the author writes, "On two occasions [Caligula] gave the people a handout of three hundred sesterces each. . . ."[55] Caligula III retains the essential components of Domitian III but compositionally strays further from the antiquarian precedents. The emperor and his platform are reversed, and a group of lictors replaces the throng of Romans at the front; Minerva in her helmet has become a Roman soldier, and the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus has been pushed deep into the background at right.[56]

Fig. 14. Maerten de Vos (Netherlandish, 1532–1603). Design for a tazza with scenes from the life of Paris, 1578 or 1598. Pen and brush and brown ink, brown wash, and traces of black chalk, Diam. 9¾ in. (24.6 cm); signed and dated (upper left): *M.D. Vos. F / 1578* [or *1598*]. Fondation Custodia-Frits Lugt Collection, Paris (4400)

Comparison of Domitian III and Caligula III casts more light on the design process of the narrative scenes. The first step must have been the selection of subject matter: the designer searched Suetonius for episodes representative of imperial generosity—a desirable quality in a ruler and an important component for constructing the positive presentation of the Caesars on the Aldobrandini Tazze.[57] Settling upon these two episodes of generosity, he matched them to the appropriate antiquarian source material: the Panvinio detail and the *congiarium* coins. There is not enough evidence to clarify whether the designer was himself an artist involved in the formulation of the compositions (à la Ligorio), or if he fulfilled more of a consulting role (à la Panvinio), responsible only for programming the iconographic content. In either case, the antiquarian sources were eventually passed to artists who interpreted them freely, creating first the Domitian scene, and then that of Caligula.

Caligula III is essentially a variation on Domitian III: the ties between the Domitian scene and its source material are much stronger than those binding Caligula III to the *Ornatissimi triumphi* and the *congiarium* coins. It has been proposed that the tazze were carried out in two separate campaigns, because the first known archival records concerning the set mention only six of the objects, not twelve, and because only half of the dishes (Galba through Domitian) bear the Aldobrandini arms.[58] The dependence of Caligula III upon Domitian III appears to refute that hypothesis. The composition of Domitian III clearly precedes that of Caligula III, establishing that the designs for the Aldobrandini Tazze were not conceived in the chronological order of the lives of the Caesars. It would be illogical to compose a scene for the twelfth Caesar before the fourth unless the entire

commission were envisioned from the start. The dishes must, therefore, have been designed in a single campaign.[59]

During that process, once the thematic emphasis and source material had been selected, each narrative scene would initially have been worked out on paper. The compositions were likely elaborated in a series of drawings culminating with images prepared on paper fitting the shape and size of the dishes. The design for a tazza with scenes from the life of Paris by the Antwerp artist Maerten de Vos (1532–1603) offers an example of the type of drawing that would have been produced at this stage (fig. 14).[60] The goldsmiths then transferred the rudiments of the composition to the front of the dish by means of pricking: with the paper pressed against the surface, they used a sharp tool to prick tiny dots along the outlines of the composition, punching through the paper and into the silver. These marks are most visible in the contours of architectural structures and landscape, although they can also be found in details of antiquarian elements such as the tripod in Domitian III (figs. 15, 16).

After pricking the outlines, the goldsmiths—clearly accomplished draftsmen—probably drew the complete composition directly on the silver to serve as a guide during the chasing process. An early seventeenth-century silver basin created by a Northern artist working in England bears traces of this same pattern transfer process.[61] That basin, however, was embossed from the back, and therefore the pricking appears on its reverse, resulting in mirror images of its print sources. The Aldobrandini dishes, in contrast, were worked almost exclusively from the front; there is no evidence of pricking on the back, and the visual sources are reproduced with their original orientation except in the case of the emperor on Caligula III.[62] In that scene, Caligula faces the opposite direction from his Panvinio precedent and from his twin in Domitian III.[63] This change is not technically produced but is instead the result

Fig. 15. Detail of Vitellius IV (p. 25) showing goldsmiths' pricking marks

Fig. 16. Detail of Domitian III (p. 31) showing goldsmiths' pricking marks

echoes the structure depicted on a gold aureus of Claudius (A.D. 44) (Claudius II, p. 16 and fig. 19).[68] Variants derived from this same architectural motif can likewise be found in Galba IV and Otho II (pp. 21, 22). In employing numismatic sources on the tazze, the designer prioritizes the subject matter over any actual historical relationship connecting the specific coin to the Caesar in question.

Numismatic studies seem to have been useful to the designer for their wealth of ancient imagery, and also for their interpretation of the emblems' iconographic content. The treatises vary in their organization, sometimes grouping coins by ruler or historical period, and sometimes by theme or subject matter—the latter approach resembling that of the designer of the tazze's narrative scenes.[69] Goltzius's *Fastos magistratuum* (Bruges, 1566), for example, contains a section titled *Bellum Germanicum*, which reproduces a number of coins topically connected to German wars.[70] On the first page under that heading, we encounter, grouped together, images of a pinecone, a river god, and the goddess Cybele (fig. 20). All of these images appear in Tiberius II, an episode dedicated to the emperor's "pacification" of the tribes of southern Germany and featuring antagonists—knights and landsknechts—of a decidedly sixteenth-century variety (p. 12).[71]

The "Germans" on Tiberius II carry standards of two types, one emblazoned with the pinecone, the other with Cybele in a chariot pulled by lions. Both emblems are easily located in Renaissance numismatic books, such as Goltzius's text (fig. 21).[72] In the foreground of Tiberius II, to underscore the fact that the Germans are losing the battle, their standards are trampled underfoot. Despite that fact, since the pinecone is the symbol of Augsburg, its appearance in Tiberius II has been wrongly interpreted as evidence that the tazze were made in the city (without accounting for the accompanying presence of Cybele).[73]

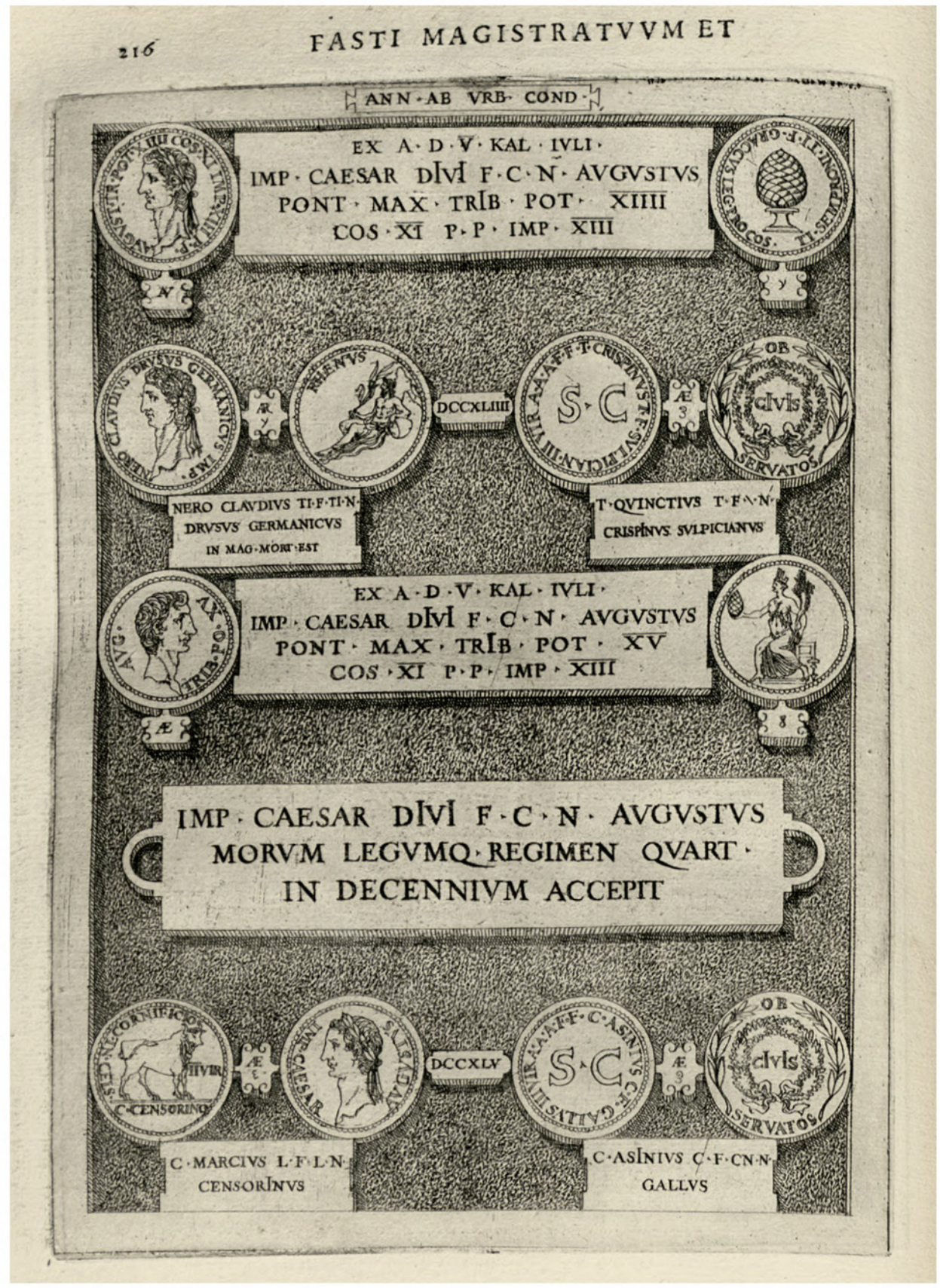
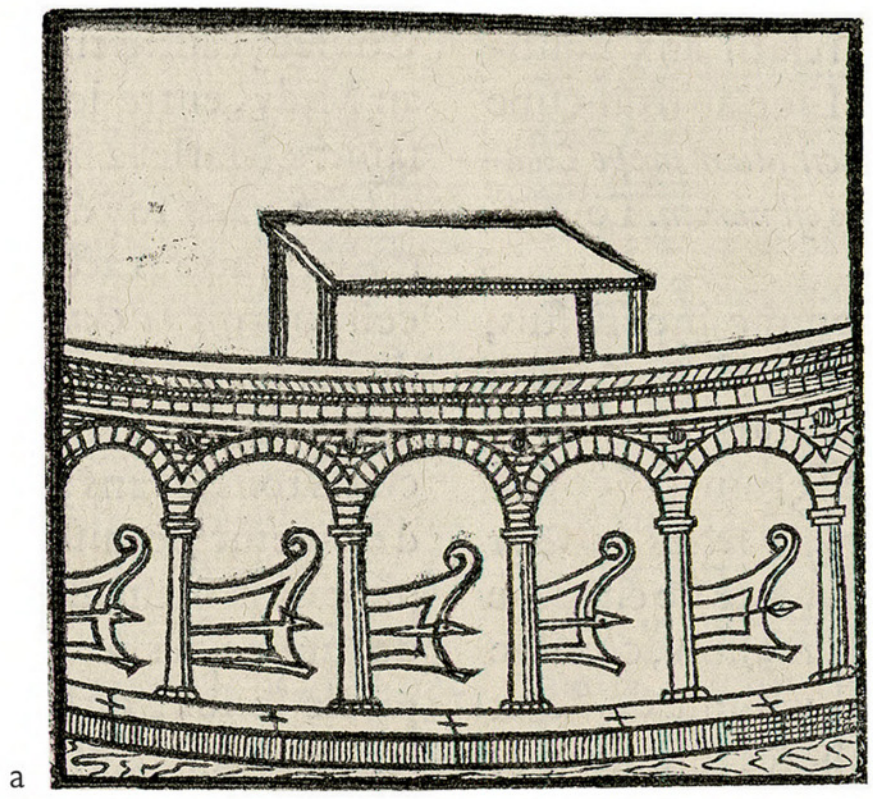


Fig. 20. Hubert Goltzius (Netherlandish, 1526–1583). Engraved illustration of ancient Roman coins commemorating wars fought against the Germans. From Goltzius 1566, p. 216

Fig. 21. Hubert Goltzius. Engraved illustration of an ancient Roman coin depicting the goddess Cybele in a chariot pulled by lions (detail). From Goltzius 1566, p. 206



a

b

c

Fig. 25. The motif of the *Rostra* (ceremonial platform) topped by a *subsellium* (bench) occurs in (a) an engraving from Vigenère 1583, p. 611, and (b) a detail from Nero I (p. 18) that derives from (c) a silver denarius of Palicanus, Rome, 45 B.C., American Numismatic Society, New York (1944.100.3528)

ancient words and images is manifest throughout the narrative scenes.

Laevinus Torrentius and the Testimony of Ancient Coins

One late sixteenth-century antiquarian volume is especially relevant to the Aldobrandini Tazze. In 1578, the Flemish humanist Laevinus Torrentius published in Antwerp an illustrated commentary on Suetonius's *Twelve Caesars*.[88] An expanded second edition was published in 1592, with the addition of a frontispiece engraved by Peeter van der Borcht.[89] There, the title, *C. Svetonii Tranqvilli XII Caesares, et in eos Laevini Torrentii commentarivs avctior et emediator*, is surrounded by twelve profile busts of the Caesars set into circular frames with inscriptions in imitation of numismatic portraits (fig. 26).[90] The text itself is studded with illustrations of ancient coins. Torrentius (1525–1595), also called Lieven van der Beke, was born in Ghent but spent significant time in Italy, earning a doctorate in law at Bologna and studying antiquities in Rome before returning north, where he developed close ties with famous humanists, including Justus Lipsius (1547–1606).[91] A diplomat for the Habsburg rulers of the Southern Netherlands, Torrentius championed the Counter-Reformation and was eventually named the second bishop of Antwerp in 1587.[92] In 1594, Torrentius was chosen by the Spanish king Philip II to serve as archbishop of the Low Countries, although he died before being installed.[93]

Torrentius's antiquarian interests were piqued in the 1550s, during his five years in Rome.[94] There, he joined a circle of celebrated writers and humanists, becoming especially friendly with the numismatist Fulvio Orsini. He also developed a great admiration for Antonio Agostín, whose collection inspired Torrentius to become an antiquarian himself.[95] He began collecting while in Rome; later, his home in Liège was recorded as being filled with books and manuscripts, bronzes, marbles, cameos, and

Fig. 28. Printed image of the gold aureas seen in fig. 19, here illustrating a passage from Suetonius's *Life of Claudius*. From Torrentius 1592, p. 244. The design also appears in Claudius II (p. 16).

employ the same coin reverse to illustrate Suetonius's text. Claudius II, for example, represents a scene from chapter 10 of Suetonius's *Life of Claudius*, and, as mentioned above, features an architectural element—the Praetorian camp—based on a gold aureus (Claudius II, p. 16). Torrentius reproduces the same coin in his discussion of that chapter (fig. 28).[102] Another parallel can be found when examining the source for the image of Nero playing his lyre in Nero II, which relates to chapter 21 of his *Life* (fig. 29). The coin in question, depicting Nero as Apollo Citharoedus (see fig. 17), is pictured in Torrentius's discussion of Suetonius's chapter 25, where Suetonius actually makes reference to it, saying that Nero, in his vanity, had a coin struck of himself playing the lyre (fig. 30).[103]

The Aldobrandini Tazze and Torrentius's commentary reflect a similar form of antiquarian interpretation. In both cases, the ancient coins are understood to provide a valid alternative historical testimony, offering an evocative means through which to explore and expand the record preserved within classical text. This high regard for numismatic information was shared by many late sixteenth-century antiquarians: Peter Burke has discussed the preference expressed by Erizzo and Agostín for ancient coins over written words, with the former considered a more trustworthy mechanism for investigating the past.[104]

According to Burke, the proliferation in the late Renaissance of ancient texts illustrated with antiquarian imagery should be connected to that period's trends in collecting, "to the rise of private collections of classical sculpture and of cabinets of curiosities, especially cabinets of coins and medals"—that is, collections just like the one owned by Torrentius, himself.[105] There is a clear relationship between Torrentius's personal hoard of ancient coins and his numismatic approach to Suetonius's *Twelve Caesars*—he may even have begun collecting with his commentary in mind.[106] One imagines him poring over the text, making annotations, his coins scattered across the table. It is reasonable to wonder whether a similar collection of antiquities might have played a parallel role in the creation of the Aldobrandini Tazze. However, no ancient sources have been discovered for the narrative scenes that could not have been easily located in widely available books or prints. This would suggest that the intellectual activity of constructing the scenes took place outside Rome, where real, concrete antiquities could be observed in abundance. The designer's desk may have been covered exclusively in paper resources rather than by reference materials in any more substantial medium.

Guillaume du Choul's Roman Camp Reimagined

Thus far, there is only one Renaissance numismatic treatise that can be securely linked to the Aldobrandini Tazze—one that we know must have had space on the designer's desk: Guillaume du Choul's study of Roman military customs, the *Discours sur la castramétation et la discipline militaire des*

Fig. 29. Detail of Nero II (p. 18) showing the emperor playing his lyre

Fig. 30. Engraving of an ancient Roman coin depicting Nero as Apollo Citharoedus. From Torrentius 1592, p. 298

Romains (*Discourse on Roman Military Camps and Customs*), first published in Lyon by Guillaume Rouillé in 1554. Du Choul, a French historian and collector who dedicated his volume to the French king Henri II, included in his *Discours* images from coins as well as from a wide variety of ancient reliefs and artifacts available in Rome and France.[107] The book proved immensely popular; new editions were printed nearly every year, with twenty-two issued between 1554 and 1582, including translations into Italian and Spanish.[108] The woodcut illustrations accompanying the text were conceived by Du Choul and carried out by a team of anonymous artists associated with Rouillé's shop.[109] As Yvonne Hackenbroch observed in 1950, one of these illustrations, a Roman camp, provides the setting for the last scene on the Otho dish, in which the emperor takes his own life (fig. 31 and p. 23).[110]

The final chapters of Suetonius's *Life of Otho* describe the emperor's noble suicide. Distraught over his failures and inspired by the suicide of one of his soldiers, Otho stabs himself with a dagger.[111] In Otho IV, this action takes place at the very center of the composition, where the emperor reclines in his tent; he is pictured just at the moment of plunging the dagger into his breast. Outside, the busy camp is packed with soldiers, all enclosed by the tall picket fence inspired by Du Choul's illustration. In particular, the rendering of this mundane element reveals a glimpse into the artistic sensibility of the goldsmith responsible.

Du Choul's Praetorian camp is blocked out in thick, insensitive lines presumably inherited from the style of the ancient marble relief (*marbre antique*) it purportedly reproduces.[112] The foreground is given over to the flat boards of the camp's fence, which line the bank of a stream or small moat. In Otho IV, these details are enlivened as the fence transforms into something both more and less naturalistic. In the goldsmith's hands, the structure actually resembles wood: to the surface of every other plank, a stippled pattern has been added, creating the effect of wood grain (fig. 32). The drawbridge, which has no visible mechanism in Du Choul's image, is now convincingly supported by a taut, heavy chain. An

Ioan. Stradanus inuent.
Adrian. Collaert sculp.
Phls Galle excud.
8.
OTHO.
Mollis Otho, ac summi nimium festinus honoris,
Munera thuricremis cùm Galba imponeret aris,
Cogitat infandas cædes, et sanguine gaudet
Cæsario temerare manus: regno inde potitus
Nil dignum peragit, propriâ fit morte celebris,
Atque trahit secum socias in fata cohortes.

Fig. 33. Adriaen Collaert (Netherlandish, ca. 1560–1618) after a design by Jan van der Straet, known as Johannes Stradanus (Netherlandish, 1523–1605). *Otho*, plate 8 in *Roman Emperors on Horseback*. Published by Philips Galle, ca. 1587–89. Engraving, 12¾ × 8¾ in. (32.5 × 22.3 cm). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, purchased with the support of the F. G. Waller-Fonds, 1963 (RP-P-1963-142)

Julia Siemon

Tracing the Origin of the Aldobrandini Tazze

The earliest known documents related to the Aldobrandini Tazze are a pair of letters, the fragmentary record of an exchange that took place during the first weeks of spring 1599.[1] This correspondence, newly discovered by Antonella Fabriani Rojas, provides vital if somewhat cryptic clues in the search for the origin of the Aldobrandini Tazze. While offering no clear answers regarding the commission and manufacture of the set—we still do not know when the tazze were made, by whom, for whom, nor to what end—these and other early documents nevertheless help refine the parameters of the investigation. When examined alongside the evidence of the objects themselves, the set's form and iconography, they tell us where to look.

The Documents

On March 16, 1599, six of the twelve tazze were in Milan and available for purchase. David de' Cervi (1532–1626), an art dealer, jeweler, and goldsmith in that city, wrote of them to the duke of Mantua, Vincenzo Gonzaga, hoping to realize a sale (see Appendix A). The letter offers only a brief description of the objects, identifying them as large silver *tazzoni* on a high foot, each with a statue of an emperor positioned at its center and surrounded by finely worked scenes from that emperor's life.[2] The letter is otherwise unforthcoming: de' Cervi does not reveal which six tazze were available, how they came to be in Milan, or where the other half of the set was to be found.

De' Cervi does, however, offer one tantalizing bit of further intelligence. He writes that he has previously communicated with Count Julio [Giulio] Caffini, a member of the Mantuan court, regarding the tazze. "The Signore count," the dealer explains, "saw one of these in Ferrara."[3] The statement gives rise to more questions than answers, as de' Cervi fails to specify which tazza Caffini had examined, the circumstances of the encounter, and when it had taken place. In a second letter, dated April 1, de' Cervi agrees to bring one of the tazze to Mantua so that the duke may judge whether he would like to acquire all six. A single tazza will serve, de' Cervi explains, because all the tazze are essentially the same, distinguishable only by the identities of the emperors and their actions.[4]

Duke Vincenzo apparently declined to buy the tazze. No record of them has been found in Mantua, and three years after de' Cervi offered the tazze to the duke, six of them were again on the market in Milan. They were purchased by agents of Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini (1571–1621), a prominent member of the aristocratic family that gives the set its name. Documents registering payment for the six, dated March 26, 1602, were discovered by Stefanie Walker in Cardinal Pietro's accounts.[5]

The first known reference to the complete set of the Aldobrandini Tazze occurs in the following year: in 1603, all twelve were inventoried as part of Cardinal Pietro's prodigious silver collection. This record (also uncovered by Walker) does not reveal how the other half of the set came into the cardinal's possession. His accounts show no evidence of purchase of a second group of six tazze between 1602 and 1603—nor, for that matter, at any time previous. Still, even without such documentation, de' Cervi's letters of 1599 and the payment record of 1602 confirm that Cardinal Pietro was not the original patron of the Aldobrandini Tazze.

The cardinal may not have commissioned the tazze, but he did recognize their value.

subject matter, it is highly probable that the tazze were intended for someone in a position of princely authority.

The Twelve Caesars were a favorite theme in Renaissance art, especially among patrons claiming connection to the Holy Roman Empire. A 1607 inventory of the *Kunstkammer* of Emperor Rudolf II, for example, includes two sets of the Twelve Caesars rendered in silver—one sculptural, and the other in relief.[14] However, as Mary Beard has shown, the Aldobrandini Tazze are an extraordinary iteration, unlike any other surviving treatment of the subject.[15] Neither a rehearsal of the standard portrait series nor a faithful treatment of the Suetonian text, the tazze instead present an extensive yet deliberately misleading account of the ancient rulers and their lives. The specifics of this manipulation suggest that the set was designed to function at least partly as an appeal to power.

The Aldobrandini Tazze are perhaps best understood as an injunction to just rule. As discussed in the previous chapters, the set's designer used *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* as a means to celebrate themes of magnanimity, popularity, military prowess, and legitimate sovereignty (including dynastic succession). Represented on the interior of the twelve dishes are forty-eight narrative scenes chosen for their ability to convey these concepts—regardless of whether such treatment accurately reflects Suetonius's interpretation of the historical facts. The effect is aspirational: good omens are often represented even if they proved false.[16] In some cases, the visual result is decidedly at odds with the mood of Suetonius's text. The fourth quadrant on the Tiberius dish (Tiberius IV) provides a representative example of this disjuncture. The scene, which comes from chapter 48, depicts the emperor's response to an earthquake in Asia Minor (Tiberius IV, p. 13). Suetonius's passage begins, "Tiberius showed large-scale generosity no more than twice."[17] What follows is a long catalogue of actions meant to illustrate Tiberius's cupidity. The chapter concludes, "He did not relieve the provinces either with any act of generosity, with the exception of the province of Asia, after its cities had been ruined in an earthquake."[18] It is this uncharacteristic gesture that appears on the Tiberius dish—an isolated example of magnanimity presented as one of the four defining events in the emperor's life. Other scenes on the tazze depict related features of effective government, such as righteous warfare and the achievement of peace, or even, in the case of Nero, dedication to the arts.[19] These various accomplishments are then applauded in scenes of the emperors' triumphs, festivities shown on nearly every tazza.[20]

There is an admonishment inherent in this presentation of noble achievement, a message directed toward the locus of power. The narrative scenes are oriented inward, as if to accommodate the viewpoint of the statuettes of the Caesars positioned at the center of each dish. This arrangement privileges the imaginary imperial gaze over that of the flesh-and-blood observer. In fact, uninterrupted views of the four dozen chased scenes can be achieved only by dismantling the objects; with the tazze intact, the Suetonian images are either partially obscured, seen upside down, or at a distorting angle. For the silver Caesars, however, the view is ideal. Each ruler, standing on his pedestal, looks down at a positive version of his life and the resulting adoration of his people. The Otho figure even leans forward to get a better view (fig. 1). He gestures outward with his right hand as he surveys the carefully edited vision of his history—a glimpse of Rome well governed.

Each tazza represents a microcosm of the ancient city and, by extension, the Roman Empire as a whole. The basic structure of the individual objects—a circle divided into segments with an elevated statue at its center—recalls Renaissance maps of an idealized ancient Rome, especially Marco Fabio Calvo's schematic rendering published in 1532 (figs. 2, 3).[21] The round shape with radiating sections is particular to Calvo's

Fig. 2. The Claudius tazza (pl. 5). Like the other members of the set, this tazza recalls the scheme of an idealized ancient Rome presented in Renaissance maps such as the one shown in fig. 3.

Fig. 7. Illustration of a statue of Philip II by Taddeo Landini, in Gualterotti 1589, Book II, p. 139. Etching, plate 8⅝ × 6⅜ in. (22 × 16.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1931 (31.72.7). Like his father Charles V, Philip is represented as an emperor of ancient Rome.

Fig. 8. Detail of the Vitellius tazza (pl. 9) showing the emperor posed and attired similarly to Philip II in fig. 7

of Lorraine.[25] For the elaborate Florentine celebration, the sculptor Taddeo Landini constructed a triumphal arch honoring the Habsburg dynasty. The arch included statues of the late emperor Charles V and his son Philip II of Spain (r. 1556–98), both portrayed in the guise of ancient Roman emperors. Their costumes and attitudes, recorded in a festival book, were extremely close to those of the Caesar figures on the Aldobrandini Tazze (figs. 5–8).[26] Although the wedding decorations included many other portraits of modern rulers, none were portrayed in similar garb.

The success of Landini's statues of Charles V and Philip II depended on late sixteenth-century viewers' ability to recognize these ostensibly antique figures as representations of modern Habsburg dynasts.[27] It may be that the creators of the Aldobrandini Tazze designed the silver Caesars to operate similarly—but rather than inviting viewers to see each statuette as the portrayal of a specific modern ruler, to have them view the set as an evocation of current imperial leadership. Although it is entirely possible that the Aldobrandini Tazze's antique vocabulary was engaged in reference to another power—the Habsburgs were by no means the only Renaissance rulers to be represented as ancient Romans—the Habsburg claim to the Holy Roman Empire constitutes the most obvious contemporary parallel to the tazze's imperial content.

Fig. 9. Gianpaolo Poggini (Italian, 1518–ca. 1582). Medal of Philip II, reverse, 1559. Silver, Diam. 1½ in. (3.9 cm). American Numismatic Society, New York (1908.78.3). Like ancient coins of Nero, this Habsburg medal carries the Augustan inscription *PACE.TERRA.MARIQ. COMPOSITA* and the figure of Peace standing before the closed doors of the Temple of Janus Quirinus.

Fig. 10. Detail of Augustus III (p. 11) showing the emperor closing the door of the Temple of Janus Quirinus

As noted earlier in this volume, one of the most important design sources for the tazze was Onofrio Panvinio's *Ornatissimi triumphi*, an illustration of the ancient Roman triumph dedicated to the Habsburg emperor Maximilian II (see fig. 3, pp. 50–51).[28] What is more, repeated overlap of the antiquarian imagery found in the tazze's narrative scenes with Habsburg imperial iconography greatly strengthens the suggestion of a link between the tazze and the Habsburg dynasty.

Comparison of the third scene on the Augustus dish (Augustus III) with a silver portrait medal for Philip II that predates the tazze by some three decades reveals evidence of this overlap. Philip, entrusted by his father with the government of the Netherlands in the mid-1550s, installed the Florentine artist Gianpaolo Poggini (1518–ca. 1582) as master of the Brussels mint in 1557.[29] In that role, Poggini created a series of portrait medals for the Spanish king, including the piece mentioned above, which commemorates the 1559 Peace of Cateau-Cambresis, drafted to end disputes between the Habsburgs and the Valois over territory in Italy.[30] The obverse of the medal bears a portrait of Philip. On its reverse, an allegorical figure of Peace stands outside the Temple of Janus Quirinus, where she sets fire to trophies of war; the inscription *PACE. TERRA.MARIQ.COMPOSITA* declares peace established on land and at sea (fig. 9).[31]

A slightly longer version of that same phrase appears in Suetonius's *Life of Augustus*. In chapter 22, the author recounts how Augustus closed the door of the temple; this ritual gesture, he explains, was performed to signal that "peace had been established on land and sea."[32] On the tazze, this action is the focus of Augustus III (fig. 10). As discussed in the previous essay, the temple in that scene derives from a coin issued by Nero.[33] On the coin, the building's image is encircled by a variation on the phrase used by Suetonius. (see fig. 27, p. 65).[34] In 1559, Poggini turned to the same ancient iconography in order to celebrate Philip II.

Abondio (1538–1591), an imperial artist at the Prague court of Archduke Maximilian's older brother Emperor Rudolf II (r. 1576–1612).[39] Of the type known as a *Gnadenpfennig*, the medal was intended for presentation; fitted within an enameled gold setting, it was meant to be worn on a chain by members of the family and those loyal to them.[40] The archduke's portrait appears on the obverse; on the reverse, beneath Maximilian's motto, *MILITEMUS* (let us fight), is a Roman army camp.[41] The source for this Praetorian camp is the same as that for Otho IV: an illustration from a treatise by the French antiquarian Guillaume du Choul, first published in the 1550s (see fig. 31, p. 68).[42]

For Archduke Maximilian III, the image of the camp bore personal as well as familial significance. He had the medal updated and reissued in 1612, when another brother, Matthias (1557–1619), supplanted Rudolf II as emperor. The new version, created by Abondio's son, Alessandro, changes only the obverse, replacing the earlier portrait with a new one that reflects the archduke's advanced age; the camp remains unaltered.[43] The Aldobrandini Tazze were made at some point between the two editions of Maximilian's medal; when Otho IV was produced, the image's Habsburg associations were robust and undiminished. Throughout the chased scenes on the tazze, ancient numismatic emblems provide visual and iconographic inspiration; the additional affinity to modern Habsburg medals is probably not coincidental. The relationship between the Aldobrandini Tazze and the medals of Archduke Maximilian III of Austria and King Philip II of Spain supports the idea that the tazze—whatever their origin—were designed with Habsburg iconography in mind.

A Proposal

The previous chapter offers a new dating for the tazze based on the appearance of their four dozen narrative scenes. It suggests that the works were probably made sometime between 1587–89 and early 1599, and, given the preponderance of typically Northern imagery on their chased surfaces, that they were likely produced in Northern Europe rather than Italy.[44] Above, it is argued that the set's celebration of imperial power can be understood to imply an association with a member of the Habsburg dynasty. Relying on this loose framework, it becomes possible to construct a hypothesis for the creation of the Aldobrandini Tazze. What follows is a possible scenario that attempts to reconcile the appearance of the tazze—their form and iconographic program—with what little is known of their history.

Ferrara 1598 and Count Giulio Caffini

The exercise begins in Ferrara. According to the documents discussed at the beginning of this essay, it was there that at some time prior to March 16, 1599, the Mantuan courtier Giulio Caffini encountered one of the Aldobrandini Tazze. There is reason to suspect that this sighting took place a few months earlier, in the fall of 1598. That November, Ferrara—and Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, in his role as papal legate—hosted some of Europe's most important personages, who gathered to celebrate two important Habsburg weddings performed in a double ceremony. The event was accompanied by an extensive display of silver and would have offered an ideal opportunity for Count Giulio to study one of the tazze.

The Habsburg double wedding of November 1598 carried tremendous political import.[45] The previous spring, after years of negotiation, King Philip II, nearing death and fearing for his legacy, had arranged marriages for two of his children, Philip III (1578–1621) and Isabella Clara Eugenia (1566–1633).[46] Both were to marry Habsburg relatives from the Austrian branch of the family in the hope of fostering peace within the empire.[47] For Philip III, his father chose the young Archduchess Margaret of Austria (1584–1611), daughter of Archduke Charles II

of Styria and granddaughter of Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I. For Isabella, the king selected his nephew, Margaret's first cousin, Archduke Albert VII of Austria (1559–1621), son of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II and brother of the reigning emperor, Rudolf II (and thus, brother also to Archduke Maximilian III of Austria, whose portrait medal is analyzed above). Archduke Albert, a cardinal with a distinguished military reputation and experience as viceroy of Portugal, would renounce his role in the church.[48] Philip III and his bride were to become king and queen of Spain; Albert and Isabella, autonomous sovereigns of the Habsburg Netherlands, where Albert was already installed as governor-general.[49]

On September 14, 1598, Archduke Albert set out from Brussels, beginning a journey that would eventually bring him to meet his bride in Spain.[50] He traveled with a large party: according to one estimate, he was accompanied by two thousand men and half again as many horses.[51] After stops in southern Germany, Albert stayed briefly with his brother the emperor in Bohemia.[52] Meanwhile, his teenage cousin Margaret departed from Vienna with her mother, Dowager-Archduchess Maria, and their own large cortege.[53] The two parties met in Trent in late October.[54] Put together, their retinues included some seven thousand people.[55] In the following weeks, they progressed through Spanish-ruled northern Italy, taking advantage of the hospitality of the local nobility. They were feted with terrific pomp, the excitement increased by the news that Philip II had died; Archduchess Margaret was greeted as queen of Spain.[56] There were parades, banquets, theatrical spectacles, and other forms of celebration in each town Margaret and Albert visited, in the most splendid Habsburg progression since midcentury.[57]

In early November they were met at Bussolengo, near Verona, by Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini and Don Juan Fernández de Velasco, Duke of Frias, the Spanish governor of Habsburg Milan.[58] The cardinal and governor had ridden out to accompany Albert, Margaret, and Maria on their journey to Ferrara, where they arrived on Friday, November 13, at eleven o'clock in the evening.[59] Two days later, Pope Clement VIII Aldobrandini presided over a preliminary wedding ceremony in the cathedral.[60] Neither of the Spanish spouses was in attendance (a second ceremony would take place in Spain). Their roles were filled by proxies, but their absence did little to curtail the festivities.[61] On the evening of the wedding, there were dances, dinner, and parties; the following day, the pope oversaw an extravagant banquet.[62]

Cardinal Pietro, in order to properly host his illustrious Habsburg guests and the assorted dignitaries, had assembled an enormous amount of silver. He gathered so much, in fact, that other Italian nobles, anticipating visits from the wedding party as they continued on their journey, were unable to find silver for their own celebrations.[63] Such was the case for the Mantuan duke, Vincenzo Gonzaga. A month before the wedding, on October 10, 1598, one of the duke's agents, Feliciano Amigoni, wrote from Venice admitting that he had utterly failed in his task to rent silver—there was simply none to be had. Amigoni explains that it is "too late . . . because the illustrious cardinal [Pietro] Aldobrandini . . . has rented all the silver belonging to the Venetian nobility, to the extent of some three thousand pieces."[64] A few days earlier, Eugenio Cagnani, a Mantuan agent in Milan charged with gathering between one hundred fifty and two hundred silver plates, had complained of similar difficulty, saying that he could not find any silver tableware that matched or was of fine enough quality, and that there was not time enough to have anything newly made.[65] Another letter, of November 7, documents the arrival of the Venetian silver in Ferrara.[66]

Even allowing for hyperbole, it is clear that Cardinal Pietro had amassed a terrific quantity of silver for the festivities. If the purported "three thousand pieces" constituted the portion he obtained in Venice alone, there must have been much more.

the Florentine wedding of Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici and Christine of Lorraine in 1589, described above.[72] He also went to the Netherlands with Duke Vincenzo to visit Albert and Isabella in Brussels and Antwerp in the fall of 1599.[73] If Caffini attended the Habsburg wedding, and if the Aldobrandini Tazze were there as well, it is logical that he in particular would have been invited to study one of the objects: Mantuan correspondence reveals that Caffini often served as an arbiter for the duke in arts-related matters. A letter of 1602 reports that Caffini had "acted as intercessor" during negotiations for the duke's potential purchase of a painting.[74] Caffini—who was godfather to the composer Claudio Monteverdi's first daughter—also handled tasks relating to the performing arts, such as securing a new prologue to Giovan Battista Guarini's drama *Il Pastor Fido* in honor of Albert and his bride, Isabella.[75] Most relevant to the tazze, however, is the fact that, when, again in 1602, a Mantuan agent in Milan wrote to the duke regarding a number of acquisitions, the author declined to elaborate on his dealings with silver, explaining that "regarding the silver, for now I will say no more to your highness on the subject, because the [Milanese] goldsmith [Tomaso] Rovida says that he has written enough about it already to the *signor* count Giulio Caffini."[76] If any of Duke Vincenzo's courtiers had the privilege to examine one of the tazze in Ferrara, it would have been Count Giulio.

There can be no doubt that at a banquet, all twelve certainly would have been displayed together. But the tazze, with their intricate reliefs and ambitious subject matter, demand close looking. Perhaps Caffini's role as art adviser at the Mantuan court earned him a special invitation to study one of the tazze carefully, under different circumstances. David de' Cervi confirms the validity of this idea when, in April 1599, he proposes to show only one tazza to Duke Vincenzo, remarking that a single tazza suffices to give an idea of all twelve.[77]

Milan 1599 and Habsburg Gifts

The circumstances surrounding the wedding in Ferrara neatly align with the historical peculiarities of Cardinal Pietro's disjointed acquisition of the tazze and the set's presumed arrival in Italy from the North. The timing of events is particularly suggestive. Following the marriage ceremony, Archduke Albert and the new Queen Margaret continued on their way through northern Italy, traveling to Mantua before heading to Milan.[78] Once again they were accompanied on their journey by Cardinal Pietro. A print by Antonio Tempesta depicts the group's arrival in Milan on November 30, 1598 (fig. 14). The image matches an account written a few days later, recalling Margaret riding under a fine canopy followed closely by Cardinal Pietro, Archduke Albert, and Dowager-Archduchess Maria. Welcoming them was Giovanni [Don Juan] Fernández de Velasco, the city's Spanish governor.[79] The wedding party remained in Milan for nearly two months. On February 3, 1599, they set out for the port of Genoa; on

Fig. 14. Antonio Tempesta (Italian, 1555–1630). *Triumphal Entry of Margaret of Austria into Milan*, pl. 10 in Tempesta 1612. Etching, sheet 11¼ × 7⅞ in. (28.5 × 20 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1931 (31.67.7[11]). Following their proxy weddings in Ferrara, the new Queen Margaret of Spain and Archduke Albert of Austria were accompanied by Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini (portrayed here wearing a galero) to Milan.

had been born in Ghent and had passed to him local hereditary legitimacy as duke of Burgundy and Brabant.[101] These themes were emphasized in Ernest's Joyous Entry into Brussels; Ernest wrote to his brother Rudolf II of how touched he was by this demonstration of the people's faith in him and his future rule.[102] Several months later, on June 14, 1594, he was officially welcomed into Antwerp with another Joyous Entry.

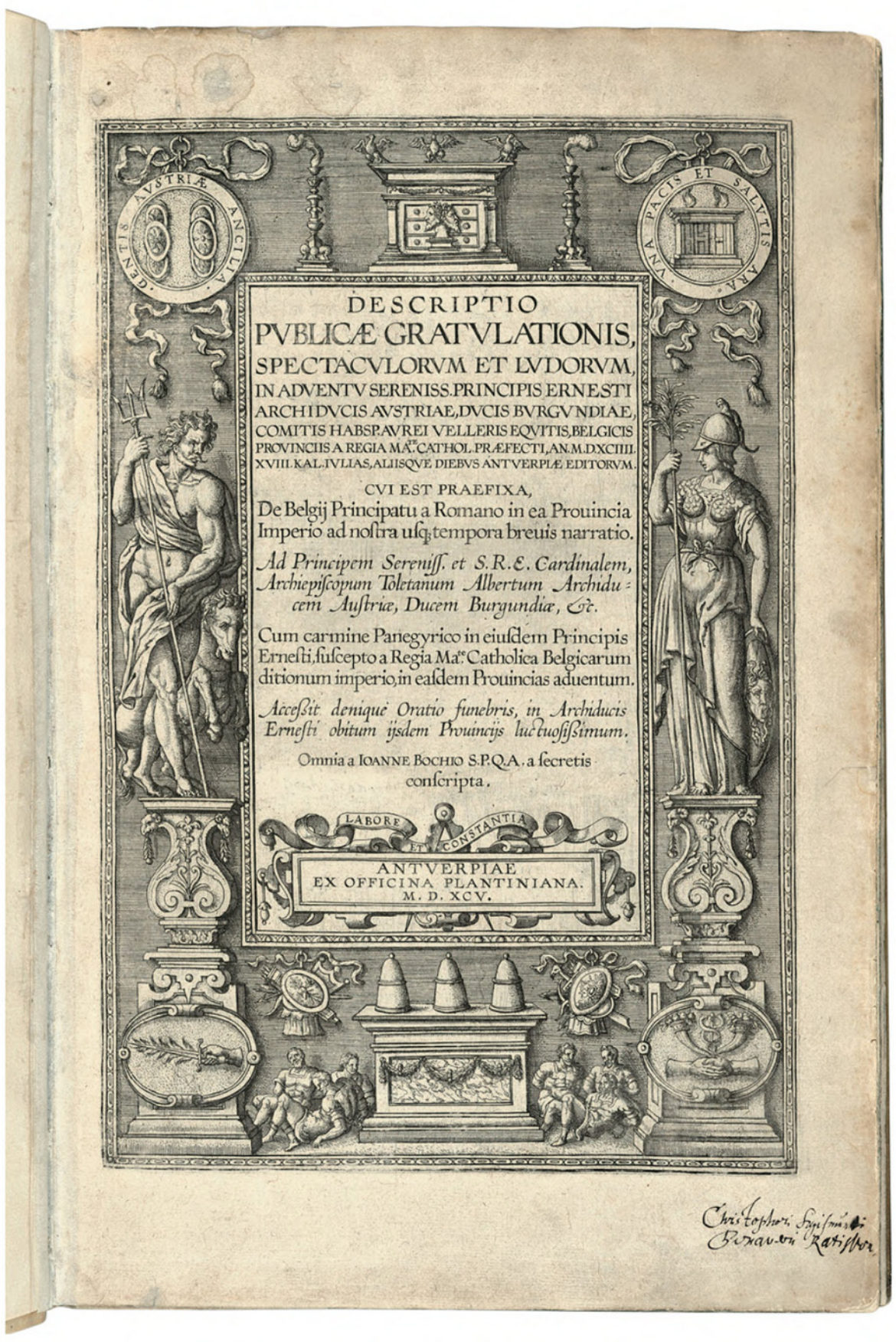

DESCRIPTIO
PVBLICÆ GRATVLATIONIS,
SPECTACVLORVM ET LVDORVM,
IN ADVENTV SERENISS. PRINCIPIS ERNESTI
ARCHIDVCIS AVSTRIAE, DVCIS BVRGVNDIAE,
COMITIS HABSP. AVREI VELLERIS EQVITIS, BELGICIS
PROVINCIIS A REGIA MA.TE CATHOL. PRÆFECTI, AN. M.D.XCIIII.
XVIII. KAL. IVLIAS, ALIISQVE DIEBVS ANTVERPIÆ EDITORVM.
CVI EST PRAEFIXA,
De Belgij Principatu a Romano in ea Prouincia
Imperio ad noſtra uſq; tempora breuis narratio.
Ad Principem Sereniſſ. et S.R.E. Cardinalem,
Archiepiſcopum Toletanum Albertum Archidu-
cem Auſtriæ, Ducem Burgundiæ, &c.
Cum carmine Panegyrico in eiuſdem Principis
Erneſti, ſuſcepto a Regia Ma.te Catholica Belgicarum
ditionum imperio, in eaſdem Prouincias aduentum.
Acceſsit denique Oratio funebris, in Archiducis
Erneſti obitum ijsdem Prouincijs luctuoſiſsimum.
Omnia a IOANNE BOCHIO S.P.Q.A. a ſecretis
conſcripta.
LABORE ET CONSTANTIA
ANTVERPIAE
EX OFFICINA PLANTINIANA.
M. D. XCV.
GENTIS AVSTRIÆ ANCILLA
ARA PACIS ET SALVTIS

Fig. 15. Peeter van der Borcht (Netherlandish, ca. 1545–1608). Frontispiece to Bochius 1595. Engraving, plate 13 × 8⅝ in. (32.9 × 21.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1916, transferred from the Library (22.106.76)

Connecting the Tazze to Ernest's Joyous Entry into Antwerp

Like the Aldobrandini Tazze, celebration of Ernest's Joyous Entry into Antwerp glossed over past troubles in order to communicate hope for the future in a message intended for someone in a position of power. As Peter Davidson and Adriaan van der Weel have written, the primary purpose of the event was not to honor the archduke's accomplishments, but rather "to appeal to the governor to do his utmost to aid the revival of the city."[103] Paid for with municipal funds, planned by city councils and committees, and realized by teams of artists, the event functioned, in Roy Strong's words, as "a dialogue between the prince and his subjects, who paid homage but respectfully reminded him of the virtues he should cultivate and the liberties of his subjects that he should respect."[104] The decorations emphasized the aspirational themes—of legitimacy, magnanimity, military victory, and the achievement of peace—that are so emphatically underscored on the tazze. In the entry celebrations and Johannes Bochius's explication of the event, these desires were couched in symbolic terms adopted from the ancient Roman past; perhaps unsurprisingly, there is significant overlap with elements from the Aldobrandini Tazze.

Bochius, Antwerp's scholarly city secretary, played an important role in the organization of the entry and was paid by the city for his contributions.[105] Born in Brussels, he had been educated in Leuven and Rome and had traveled widely in Europe.[106] His learning is made plain in the *Descriptio publicae gratulationis*, which provides detailed examination of the motivations and meaning behind the decorations and pageants created for the festival, much of which he himself designed.[107] (In the planning of the iconographic program, he was assisted by the painters Ambrosius Francken and Maerten de Vos.)[108] The book also includes nearly three dozen illustrations engraved by Peeter van der Borcht (ca. 1545–1608) after

Fig. 19. Anonymous (circle of Frans Floris?). The Brussels Album, sheet no. 7: Main wedding feast in the Great Hall of the Royal Palace in Brussels, held in honor of Maria of Portugal and Alessandro Farnese (November 18, 1565), 1566. Pen, brown iron-gall ink, washed in brown, red, yellow, and blue watercolor, pulverized gold and silver, on goatskin parchment grounded with white chalky-glue undercoat, 11⅞ × 15¼ in. (30 × 38.8 cm). Warsaw University Library (Zb. Król. Wol. 755)

professor at Leuven and a member of a network of Netherlandish scholars active in the 1590s and dedicated to the study of ancient Rome.[147] Lipsius corresponded with the Antwerp city secretary Johannes Bochius as well as the city's bishop, Laevinus Torrentius, whose commentary on Suetonius's *Twelve Caesars*, reissued in expanded form in 1592, seems to have been an essential resource for the designer of the Aldobrandini Tazze.[148] Lipsius's *De militia Romana* was in press when Ernest died in 1595; the author halted publication in order to provide a new dedication to the Spanish crown prince Philip III.[149] (Illustrations for the text, which was reissued in 1598, were engraved by Peeter van der Borcht, who also provided the illustrations for Bochius's *Descriptio* and Torrentius's commentary.)[150] In 1598, Lipsius dedicated a treatise on the grandeur of Rome, his *Admiranda sive de Magnitudine Romana Libri IV*, to Archduke Albert.[151] (Albert thanked the author with a silver-gilt tazza made by Artus de Rasier.)[152] The celebration of ancient Rome in the *Admiranda* had a clear political message; as Marc Laureys has explained, it "pressed upon the mind of [Lipsius's] dedicatee Albert of Austria" that for Habsburg rulers, "the greatness of Rome was a part of their own history and thus represented a challenge to live up to."[153] This message was paralleled in the iconography of the Joyous Entries: on one arch erected in Brussels, Albert was shown in the place of Augustus, striving to close the door of the Temple of Janus Quirinus.[154]

Fig. 22. Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577–1640) and Jan Brueghel the Elder (Flemish, 1568–1625). *Allegory of Sight*, 1617. Oil on panel, 25½ × 43⅛ in. (64.7 × 109.5 cm). Museo del Prado, Madrid (P01394)

pedestal of each Caesar figure is inscribed with that emperor's name. All the names have standard Latin spellings except "Tiberius," which appears as *TIWERIUS*. Ivo Raband has observed that the substitution of *W* for *B* might relate to the Habsburg idiom of the archducal court at Brussels; under Albert and Ernest the dominant languages were German and Spanish, with written records often using Spanish terms to identify works of art. In such a linguistic context, B-V-W might have been easily confused.[192] This spelling mistake, like so many of the tazze's apparent idiosyncracies, can be explained by connecting the set to the archdukes.

Situating the tazze in the world of the Habsburg archdukes offers a means to reconcile the hybridity of the set's form, subject matter, imagery, and style.[193] This blend of features highlights the extraordinary internationalism of the goldsmith's art. Still, the particular amalgam of interests and influences recognizable in the tazze seems at home in the Southern Netherlands under the archdukes. The culture they fostered is embodied in the *Allegory of Sight* (1617), by Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625) and Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) (fig. 22). This painting, now at the Museo del Prado, Madrid, offers a vivid evocation of the relationship between art, politics, and art making in the Habsburg Netherlands. It is easy to imagine the tazze among the other works depicted in the painting's imaginary *Kunstkammer*: objects in precious metal, ancient and contemporary coins, Renaissance medals, classical busts, books, prints, copies after more recent works of art, maps, rugs, plants, and animals gathered from the empire's farthest realms—and more obvious Habsburg emblems such as the double-headed eagle atop the chandelier. For now, the proposal outlined in this essay remains speculative, and the mystery surrounding the tazze intact. But no matter their origin, the Aldobrandini Tazze will continue to inspire viewers to consider the complex interplay of art and power.

and service to the emperor.[26] The imagery on the cup shows Charles V receiving Egmond and his lieutenant, Count Jean de Ligne, at his camp in Ingolstadt.[27] (This peaceful meeting of two forces relates thematically to the second scene on the Caligula dish, picturing Roman officials meeting Eastern dignitaries [Caligula II, p. 14].) The event is commemorated by an engraved inscription on the outer lip: "On September 15, 1546, Maximilian, Count of Buren, having crossed the Rhine despite his enemies, reunited his troops at the camp of the Emperor."[28] It is thanks to these troops that Charles V defeated the Protestants at Mühlberg on April 24, 1547. On the lid of the cup, illustrated some two hundred years later in a finely detailed print, a narrative scene shows Egmond and his troops crossing the Rhine to reach the emperor's camp (fig. 6).[29] The crowning figure of a warrior in ancient armor stands as a familiar symbol in the celebration of might and public power. Similar figures top the English Monument and the Aldobrandini Tazze, and comparable statuettes decorate a wide range of ceremonial objects that functioned as symbols of office, such as the silver

Fig. 5. Veere Cup. Antwerp, 1546–48. Gilt silver, H. 22⅜ in. (56.7 cm). Community of Veere, the Netherlands (GVE16)

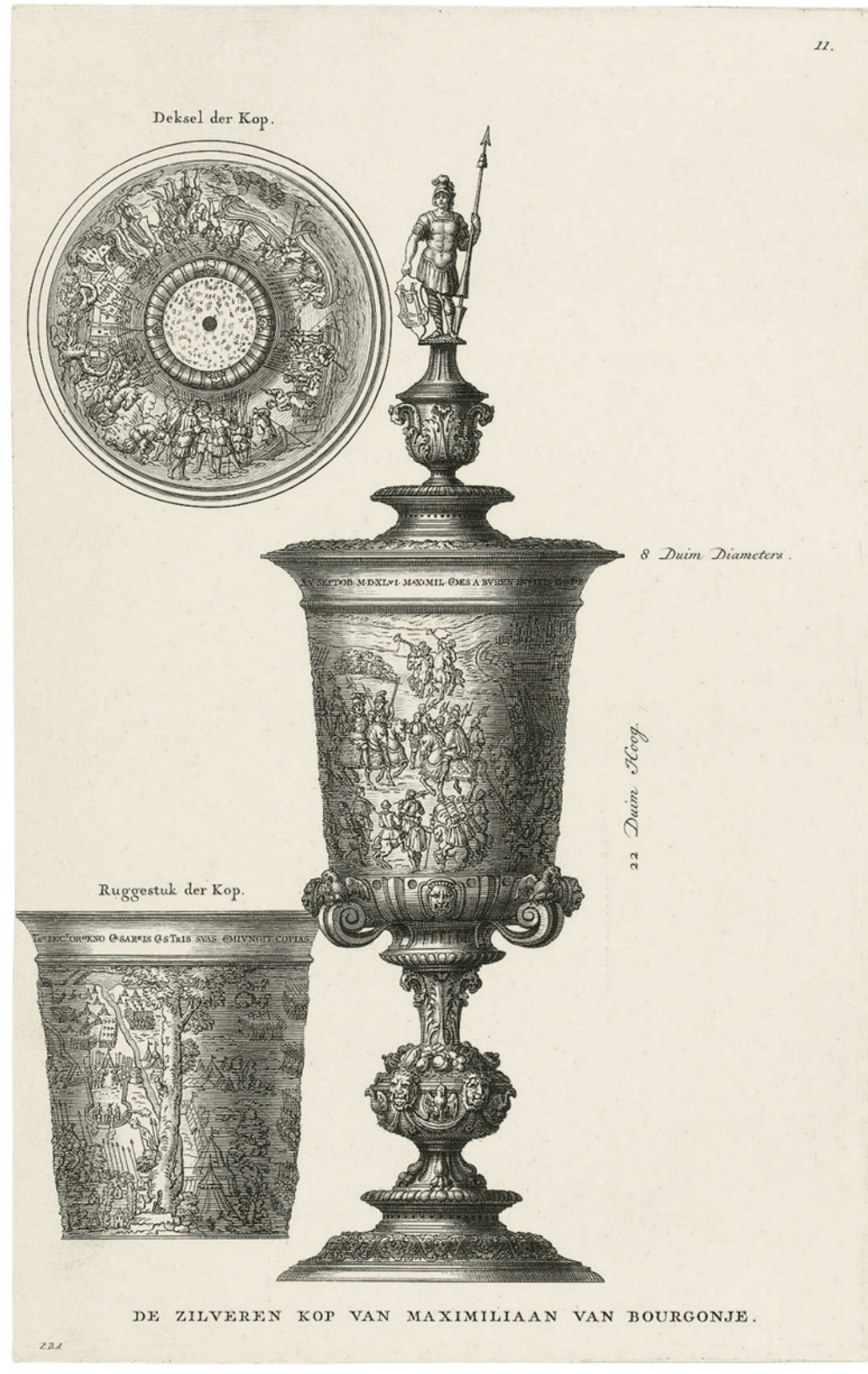


Fig. 6. Caspar Jacobsz. Philips (Dutch, 1732–1789) after Pieter Beuckels (Flemish, 1728–1815). *Silver Cup of Maximilian of Burgundy*, 1751. Etching/engraving, 15 × 9⅝ in. (38 × 24.2 cm). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (RP-P-OB-84.153)

Fig. 8. Anton Bays (Netherlandish, active ca. 1572–93). *Banquet of the Hohenems Family*, 1578. Oil on canvas, 6 ft. 10⅝ in. × 17 ft. 9⅜ in. (210 × 542 cm). Municipal Museum, Policka, Czech Republic

Fig. 9. Anonymous. *The Banquet of the Order of the Golden Fleece*. Germany, 1585. Oil on parchment, 12¼ × 23⅝ in. (31 × 60 cm). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Kunstkammer (KK 5348)

festivities they put on.[18] Stefanie Walker has drawn attention to the writings of stewards employed in prominent Roman households during this period.[19] Their reports contain precise information about the decoration of banqueting rooms, the monumental sideboards topped by canopies adorned with coats of arms, and the unfolding of elaborate feasts accompanied by music. They describe the first courses, cold and warm, and the successive dishes *di credenza* (from the sideboard, thus cold, sweet, and salty) and *di cucina* (from the kitchen, therefore warm). The meal ended with a final course of sweet desserts from the sideboard.

Fortunately for posterity, the Aldobrandinis' steward, Vittorio Lancellotti, published a book, *Lo scalco prattico*, in 1627. In it, he wrote of the noteworthy meals he had organized from 1602 to 1627, and in particular, those hosted by Pietro Aldobrandini and, later, Pietro's nephew Ippolito, at their palace in Rome and their Villa Belvedere, in Frascati.[20] There are only nine mentions of *tazze imperiali* (tazze of the largest size) in Lancellotti's book, which means that this particular type of tableware was used infrequently, for only the most important banquets, when the full splendor of the house was on display. The twelve tazze that are

waves and fish; and in the center were "two marine statuettes," perhaps a pair of entwined tritons or mermaids. Weighing about two pounds and nine ounces, respectively, these objects could not compare in size or magnificence to the Aldobrandini Tazze.

Closer to the Aldobrandini inventory in date is the inventory of silver belonging to Cardinal Maffeo Barberini (1568–1644), recorded just after he was elected to the papacy as Urban VIII in 1623.[32] The three hundred items reflect his career as a well-to-do cardinal and diplomat on the rise. Indeed, he had worked closely with Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini and was part of his retinue on the diplomatic missions to Ferrara in 1598–99 and Lyon in 1600.[33] Maffeo's holdings were substantial but not nearly as magnificent or numerous as Pietro's, and his inventory was organized differently, divided into separate sections for silver and silver-gilt items. Pietro Spagna, the master goldsmith associated with Pietro, is cited as the expert who weighed and perhaps provided the descriptions of Maffeo's pieces.

The first section of the Barberini inventory listed silver without gilding and began with the largest single object in Maffeo's collection, a cistern for cooling bottles of wine and water.[34] At thirty-three pounds, it was not as massive as the cistern owned by Pietro, which was ten pounds heavier, but still would have provided an impressive focal point of the bottle cupboard's display. A notable group of thirty-three pieces described as *alla francese* (in the French style) was likely acquired during Maffeo's years as papal nuncio in Paris, in 1601–2 and 1605–7. Henri IV of France reportedly gave Maffeo twenty silver objects worth three thousand scudi after his first stay; after his second, the king is said to have sent him off with an entire credenza's worth of silver-gilt vessels.[35] The silver-gilt objects labeled as French in the 1623 inventory include two basin-and-ewer sets, four saltcellars, two baskets, two lanterns, and four small beakers.[36] Additional standouts in this section

Fig. 8. Attributed to Erasmus Krug the Younger (German, active 1506–52). Covered cup with coins. Probably Strasbourg, ca. 1540. Gilt silver, H. 14⅝ in. (37.2 cm). Schroder Collection, London. The cup is similar to the cup "in the German style" set with "various medals" listed in the 1644 Farnese inventory.

included a large jug or ewer (fourteen pounds) that would have accompanied the white silver cistern mentioned above and three "large, decorated" basin-and-ewer sets.[37] Yet Maffeo Barberini did not appear to own tazze of particular note, nor does the inventory list fruit stands or other objects that might be compared to the Aldobrandini Tazze. Maffeo's four small "French" tazze could be grouped together with three vessels listed in the inventory as *onappe*, a term derived from the French *hanap*, which usually refers to covered cups on a high foot.[38]

Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi (1595–1632) was the favorite nephew of Pope Gregory XV (1554–1623), who, despite his short reign (February 1621–July 1623), enabled his younger relative to accumulate titles and benefices that made him an extremely wealthy man. Another avid art collector and builder of the era, Ludovisi outlived his uncle by less than a decade. The comprehensive inventory of the *guardarobba* (wardrobe) drawn up after his death in early 1633 begins, just like the 1603 Aldobrandini inventory, with silverwork.[39] Numbering four hundred pieces, the Ludovisi silver

Fig. 1. A. W. N. Pugin (British, 1812–1852). Design for the great hall, Scarisbrick Hall, Lancashire, ca. 1840. From *Country Life* (London) 122 (March 1958), p. 506

individual; it has even been suggested that he was the model for Mr. Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.[17] Nathaniel Hawthorne described him as "a very eccentric and nervous man [who] spends all his time at the secluded hall . . . and sees nobody, not even his steward."[18] Scarisbrick's eccentricity may be gauged by the instructions he left for his funeral, which stipulated that his remains be carried from the house to the grave in a straight line. Fulfilling this request entailed the demolition of a wall, the removal of a section of hedge, and the bridging of ditches across the fields.[19]

Despite his reclusiveness, Scarisbrick developed a keen sense of the magnificent comparable to that of the more famous William Beckford. After inheriting the estate from his brother in 1833, Scarisbrick commissioned the Catholic architect A. W. N. Pugin to remodel the house in the Gothic style. The resulting edifice, completed after Scarisbrick's death, included a chapel, great hall, picture gallery, and elaborately decorated rooms, such as the Carved Oak Room and the Tudor Hall (fig. 1).

Unfortunately, no reference to the tazze has been found in the Scarisbrick archives, and we do not know exactly when Scarisbrick acquired them or how he displayed them.[20] They were, however, the most expensive item by far at his posthumous sale at Christie's in 1861, where they fetched £1,280, more than twice as much as any of his pictures. What had persuaded him to buy them? It is clear from the sale catalogues and from the house itself that Scarisbrick was fascinated by theatricality, the classical world, and fine reliefs. He was a great patron of the English painter John Martin and owned several of his large, Romantic canvases; also included in his sale were more than 160 classical gems, intaglios, and cameos, as well as a collection of silver reliefs, some mounted in black frames. The Carved Oak Room, known from photographs taken before an auction held there in 1963, was decorated with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century carved wood panels that would have provided a perfect setting for the tazze.[21] Scarisbrick may also have been attracted by the tazze's presumed papal provenance, discussed below.

At the 1861 sale, ownership of the tazze passed to Richard Attenborough, a prominent London dealer who lent two of the tazze to the landmark exhibition held at the South Kensington Museum (precursor to the Victoria and Albert Museum) the following year.[22] Attenborough, like many dealers of the time, was involved in many trades; he is recorded as a pawnbroker, goldsmith, silversmith, diamond and pearl merchant, and appraiser.[23] A stately two-story shop, newly constructed in 1870 and fitted with air-tight cases in walnut and ebony, gives a sense of the scale of Attenborough's retail activities (fig. 2).[24]

The varied business interests of the small group of elite dealers that included Lewis, Hamlet, and Attenborough suggest that London's traders in luxury goods were cultivating a global market for their wares. What is less clear is what qualities they valued in Renaissance silver. There were no

Fig. 5. View of Frédéric Spitzer's study, Paris, with two tazze visible on the near table. Photograph by A. Pepper, ca. 1890. From *Recueil: Photographies Diverses du 19e siècle*, photo album, ca. 1880–1905, Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (LL97)

the full set.[54] The electrotyped Titus dish is distinctly heavy and, unusually, was produced in panels: four forming the narrative section of the dish and a fifth for the section at the center. The reverse is smooth, lacking the nodules characteristic of electrolytic deposition, suggesting that it may have been allowed to remain in the electrolyte solution until a very heavy layer of silver had accumulated. This side of the dish seems to have then been filed down. Most of Elkington's nineteenth-century silver electrotypes are much lighter and thinner and were fabricated when the technology was fully mastered. The construction of the Titus dish raises the possibility that it is an early production, made in five pieces because the manufacturer had not yet mastered the technology.

Though the tazze attracted attention each time they appeared on the market, there is little evidence that they directly influenced the design of nineteenth-century historicist silver. However, a silver agricultural trophy

object's fluted foot, for at the time, the more elaborate Spitzer feet were widely regarded as genuine. In 1970, an article by silver scholar John F. Hayward proved the contrary and doubtless played a part in the tazze's reversal of fortune between 1960 and 1982, when the Vespasian tazza (even with a Vasters foot) (pl. 10) sold for $231,000.[56] The upward-spiraling trend continued. When the Nero/Augustus tazza (pl. 2) was sold from the Wernher collection in 2000, it made £1 million.[57]

Can the gilding and the "improved" feet fully account for the late nineteenth-century escalation in price? Probably not. While the interventions were doubtless intended to increase the tazze's value, the price rise also reflects a general market surge. The following examples from the same period indicate similar (though inconsistent) trends in the wider market for Renaissance silver and decorative arts. A Basel-made covered beaker of 1541 sold for £45 in the high-profile Bernal sale of 1855 but £300 when resold twenty years later; the Blacksmiths' Company Cup of 1625, also in the Bernal sale, made £37 10s in 1855 but £4,100 in 1911; an oval, rock-crystal bowl attributed to Valerio Belli was bought by William Beckford for just £21 in 1818 and sold in the Hamilton Palace sale in 1882 for £1,207; between 1859 and 1882, a Saint-Porchaire salt escalated from £280 to £840; a Limoges enamel portrait of Queen Claude, consort of Francis I, rose from £400 in 1861 to £1,280 in 1890; and a Gubbio lustred maiolica dish of the Judgment of Paris sold for £142 5s in 1855 and made £819 in 1884.[58]

Auction prices are only one measure of changing economic conditions and taste. The consistent interest aroused by the Aldobrandini Tazze during the nineteenth century reflects a rising appreciation for virtuoso workmanship in the elite field of goldsmiths' work, which was felt to be threatened by the rise of industrial manufacturing. In addition, the stature of Renaissance art objects benefited from a growing body of scholarship and the nascent discipline of art history. Because of the vicissitudes suffered by the tazze—their dispersal, the replacement of some of the feet, and, most significantly, the misalignment of the components—they were admired for their workmanship, but their meaning was lost. This story is interesting in itself as a window onto the character of nineteenth-century taste and the growth of antiquarianism and the antiques market. More specifically, the present research initiative, which has untangled much of the complex history of the tazze, should open the door to understanding them as a single, extraordinarily ambitious work of art.

Fig. 8. Christofle & Cie. Agricultural trophy modeled by Pierre Louis Rouillard (1820–1881) and Eugène Capy (1829–1894), 1861. Silver, H. 25¼ in. (64 cm)

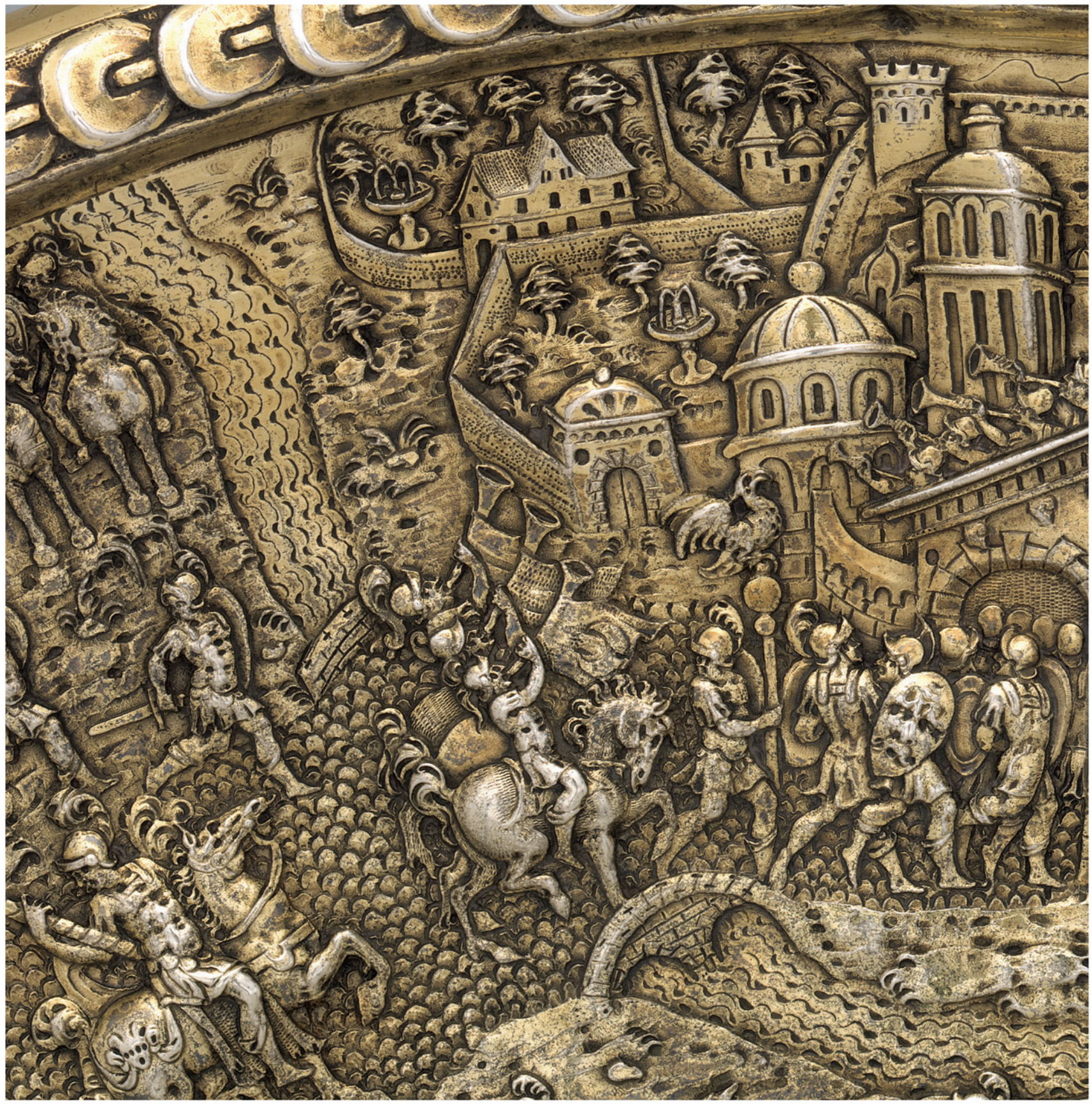


Fig. 4. Detail of Vitellius IV (p. 25). Evidence of the use of a variety of tools is apparent in the chased decoration.

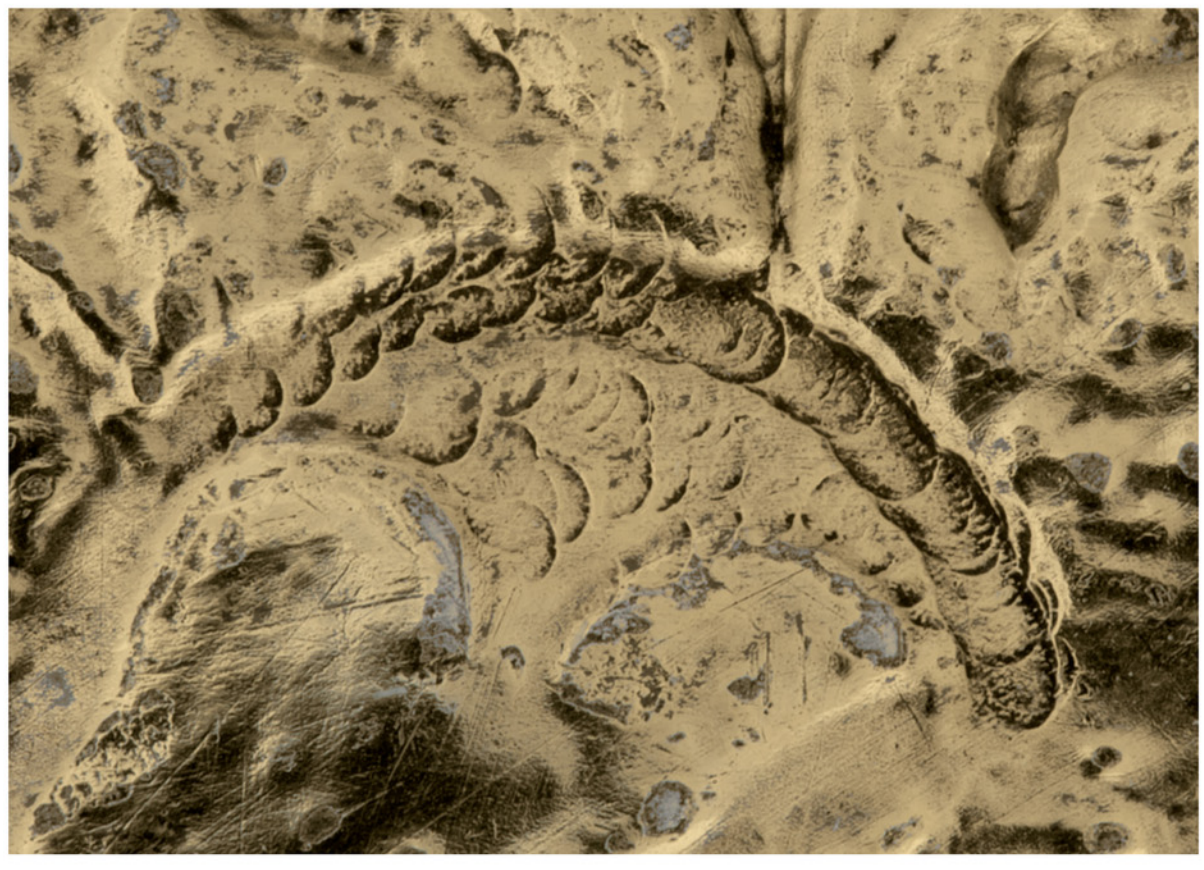


Fig. 5. Reverse of Vitellius IV showing marks made by a round punch used to define the raised front arch of the bridge seen in fig. 4

una piccola catena, pesa libre sette oncie tre et un quarto___ lib. 7 on. 3 1/4 --

N.° 6. Una Catinella da Camera per lavare le mani con un'Aquila intagliata nel fondo, et una Brocca compagna col manico alto lavorato con due teste scolpite et un mascarone al becchetto dell'acqua, pesano libre otto oncie nove ___ lib. 8 on. 9 --

N.° 7. Un Catino da Camera con suo Boccale col coperchio staccato, che hà una testa d'Aquila per buttar'acqua, pesano libre sei oncie quattro ___ lib. 6 on. 4 --

N.° 8. Una Catinella per lavare le mani con Boccale, et coperchio alla Spagnola, pesa libre cinque oncie nove ___ lib. 5 on. 9 --

N.° 9. Un Cuccometto d'argento con un'Aquila intagliata dinanzi con suo coperchio attaccato con catenella, pesa libre dua oncie sette e meza ___ lib. 2 on. 7 1/2

N.° 10. Un Cuccomino piccolo schietto con coperchio attaccato con una Catenella, pesa libre una oncie un quarto ___ lib. 1 on. -- 1/4

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Argenti

Camera

N.° 11. Un Lumino in forma di Tempio in tre pezzi con Stella sopra, pesa libre sei oncie dua e meza et denari sei ___ lib. 6 on. 2 d.ri 18

N.° 12. Un Candeliero da studio grande con un Lumino sopra in forma di Piramide, che finisce in una palla, col suo guardalume et moccatore, con Arme del S.r Card.le nella Piramide, pesa libre dieci oncie sette ___ lib. 10 on. 7 --

N.° 13. Un paro di Candelieri indorati piccoli da Studio, pesano tutti due libre una oncie cinque ___ lib. 1 on. 5 --

N.° 14. Un Calamaro fatto à sepoltura sù quattro Arpie con zampe di Leone, tutto lavorato con mascare et festoni indorati, con la Prudenza in forma d'una Donna, et con l'Arme et impresa di S.S.Ill.ma, pesa libre quattordici ___ lib. 14 on. -- --

N.° 15. Un Calamaro d'argento à sepoltura sopra quattro Leoni, et con la Virtù in forma di Donna sopra al coperchio, pesa libre otto, oncie quattro, denari diciotto ___ lib. 8 on. 4 d.ri 18

N.° 16. Un Calamaro d'argento in forma d'una Cassa sù le zampe di Leone, et di sopra un'Aquila in piedi, pesa libre cinque oncie sette ___ lib. 5 on. 7 --

N.° 17. Una Cassetta con calamaro et polverino da portare in Campagna, pesa netta oncie cinque et un quarto ___ lib. -- on. 5 1/4

N.° 18. Un Calamaro in Cassa di rame dorato, con cassa per le penne, calamaro, et polverino dentro d'argento, et di sopra nel coperchio un'horloggio, che serve di svegliatore con un Dio d'Amore in cima, pesa libre cinque oncie otto ___ lib. 5 on. 8 --

N.° 19/20 Due Campanelle da Camera con l'Arme di S.S.Ill.ma, uno con oro, et l'altro senza, pesano libre dua oncie due ___ lib. 2 on. 2 --

N.° 21. Un Profumino sopra tre Aquile, et con tre Armi di S.S.Ill.ma in tre pezzi, computata una Bacinetta, che serve di piedi, pesa libre sei, oncie nove ___ lib. 6 on. 9 --

N.° 22. Due Profumiere in forma di piramide, pesano libre tre, oncie tre e meza ___ lib. 3 on. 3 1/2

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Argenti

Camera

N.° 23. Una Profumiera da acqua con catenella piana in forma di fiasca tutta dorata, pesa libre una oncie nove ___ lib. 1 on. 9 --

N.° 24. Un Profumino indorato in forma di pignattino col manico attaccato, et coperchio separato, pesa libre una oncie nove [inserted] solo oncie nove, senza la libra ___ lib. 1 on. 9 --

N.° 25. Una Profumiera in due pezzi, quel di sopra è intagliato con un Vasetto à capo, et quel di sotto hà il manico, pesa libre una, oncie tre et un quarto ___ lib. 1 on. 3 1/4

N.° 26. Una Cassetta tutta d'argento, con la serratura, sopra quattro palle, con il coperchio attaccato, et con due manichi in forma di festoni da pigliarla con l'Arme d'un Card.le Spagnolo sopra il coperchio, pesa libre sei, oncie quattro ___ lib. 6 on. 4 --

N.° 27. Un Vaso per l'acqua santa da tenere al Letto, pesa oncie nove e meza ___ lib. -- on. 9 1/2

N.° 28. Una Canestra grande tutta traforata et indorata, pesa libre tre oncie dua ___ lib. 3 on. 2 --

N.° 29. Due Canestrelle alla Spagnola traforate con quattro mascaroni, indorate, pesa una libre una oncie otto, et l'altra libre una oncie sei In tutto ___ lib. 3 on. 2 --

N.° 30. Una Guantiera tutta d'oro, ovata, lavorata con Anatre et fiori, con l'Arme del S.r Cardinale pesa libre tre, oncie cinque al peso di Roma, cioe sc.di 357 d'oro in.ro ___ lib.

N.° 31. Una Guantiera d'argento, ovata indorata, lavorata di rilievo con figure et mascare, pesa libre dua, oncie tre e meza ___ lib. 2 on. 3 1/2

N.° 32. Due Guantiere tonde alla Spagnola indorate, et intagliate con un Uccello in mezo, pesa una

piedi col legno dentro, che si convertono in quattro Satiri, due maschi, e due femine, che per ciascuna reggono una Canestra di frutti, et due putti à giacere lavorati di rabesco, pesata con la stadiera grossa tutta insieme è di libre cento sessant'otto pesa ___ lib. 168 on. -- --

N.° 65. Una Cassetta quadra tramezzata dentro con due scatolini con l'Arme del S.r Cardinale nel coperchio serve per medicamenti pesa libre quattro oncie due, e d.ri 18 ___ lib. 4 on. 2: 18

N.° 66. Un'Orinale d'Argento di libre una oncie quattro, e mezzo con la cassa di velluto rosso, guarnita con frangia rossa d'oro, e seta ___ lib. 1 on. 4 1/2

N.° 67. Una palla da sapone con l'arme di S.S.Ill.ma pesa oncie nove ___ lib. -- on. 9.

N.° 68. Una Guantiera ovata, lavorata con fogliami traforati pesa libre una oncie cinque ___ lib. 1 on. 5 --

N.° 69. Un Calamaro col suo Polverino tondo col suo coperchio con l'arme di S.S.Ill.ma pesa libre una oncie sei, e mezzo ___ lib. 1 on. 6. 1/2

N.° 70. Una Catinella con la Brocchetta fatte à costa con l'arme di S.S.Ill.ma, pesano libre sette oncie sei ___ lib. 7 on. 6 --

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Argenti

Camera

N.° 71. Una catinella da sputare con li manichi con il coperchio tutto traforato con l'arme, pesa libre quattro oncie undici e mezzo ___ lib. 4 on. 11 1/2

N.° 72. Una Guantiera ovata, fatta alla Spagnuola, dorata dentro, e fuori, eccetto che 21. ovati piccoli di color d'arg.to smaltati, et è tutta traforata, et hà il piede ovato, pesa libre due oncie undici ___ lib. 2 on. 11 --

N.° 73. Un Calamaro tondo, col polverino, e coperchio, pesa lib. una onc. quattro denari 18 ___ lib. 1 on. 4 d.ri 18

N.° 74. Una Catinella con la sua Brocchetta lavorata alla Spagn.la, pesano lib. otto on. sei ___ lib. 8 on. 6 --

N.° 75. Una Canestrella, lavorata con diversi animali, e traforata, con l'arme, pesa lib. tre on. undici ___ lib. 3 on. 11 --

N.° 76. Un paro di capofuochi con quattro Bottoni, e otto anelli alli ferri con l'arme, pesano in tutto lib. vintiquattro onc. cinque ___ lib. 24 on. 5 --

N.° 77. Sette secchietti da acqua santa di diversi lavori, e fattura, pesano tutti lib, due onc. sei d.ri quindici ___ lib. 2 on. 6 d.ri 15

N.° 78. Due Torcieri scannellati col piede liscio con l'arme, pesano senza l'anima di legno lib. vinti on. dieci ___ lib. 20 on. 10 --

N.° 79. Due Vasi da fiori, fatti à coste coi manichi, pesano lib. sei ___ lib. 6 -- --

N.° 80. Quattro Vasi da fiori lavorati con festoni, e maschere, e due manichi per ciascuno, pesano tutti lib. nove on. tre d.ri 18 ___ lib. 9 on. 3 d.ri 18

N.° 81. Due Calamari con due polverini, e due coperchi, p. con l'arme in forma tonda, pesano tutti due lib. due onc. otto ___ lib. 2 on. 8 --

N.° 82. Due Vasi grandi da fiori, lavorati con festoni, e maschere coi manichi, pesano lib. dieci, on. dieci ___ lib. 10 on. 10 --

N.° 83. Due altri Vasi simili mezzani, similm.te lavorati, pesano lib. cinque onc. quattro ___ lib. 5 on. 4 --

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Argenti

Camera

N.° 84. Una Catinella liscia con l'arme di S.S.Ill.ma pesa lib. tre onc. sei, e mezzo

Num.° 85 Un Scaldaletto di fattura tonda di peso lib. cinq. onze cinq. et d.ri sei dico ___ lib. 5 on. 5 d.ri 6 --

Num.° 86 Una Brocchetta d'Argento di peso lib. dua, et o.e nove del n.° setta.ta uno ___ lib. 2 on. 9

- Due Penarole d'Argento con l'Arme di S.S.Ill.ma pesano tutte due lib. una, e onze una dico ___ lib. 1 on. 1 --

N.ro 87 Una Cattinella di peso libre tre, oncie sei denari dodeci dico ___ lib. 3 on. 6 d.ri 12

N.ro 88 Una Cattinella con la sua brocchetta liscia, che tutti insieme pesano libre sei, onze sei, et denari dodeci dico ___ lib. 6 on. 6 d.ri 12

N.° 89 Una Guantiera tutta dorata liscia ovata pesa libre dua, e onze quattro dico libr [sic] ___ lib. 2 on. 4 --

Num.° 90 Una Canestrella d'Argento tutta lavorata con animali di bassorilievo di peso libre tre, et onze nove ___ lib. 3 on. 9 --

N.° 91 Un Campanello grande liscio di manco lega con Arme di S.S.Ill.ma pesò di peso libra una, onze nove, et denari dodeci dico ___ lib. 1 on. 9 d.ri 12

Num.° 92 Un Cucumo liscio col suo boccaglio longo et coperchio con Arme di S.S.Ill.ma pesa lib. sette e onze quattro dico ___ lib. 7 on. 4 --

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